Mullah Wars
The Afghan Taliban between village and state, 1979-2001

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Abstract

Many articles and books have been written about the Taliban, but much of this has been polemic in nature and has ignored the growing mass of primary source material that is available to the interested researcher.

From Ahmed Rashid to Bruce Riedel, accounts of the Taliban movement have been a mixture of theory attached to a limited and continually repeated set of anecdotal evidence and highly detailed reportage from time spent together with the Taliban. Moreover, researchers often come with preconceptions relating to the Islamic nature of the movement, and find it difficult to offer a balanced perspective; politics is seen as politics, whereas for the Taliban, culture is also a form of politics.

I explore the evolving identity of the Taliban movement through its history, using a translation and exploration of the primary sources (including new interviews) relating to the movement which have not thus far been given a proper airing.

Where did the movement that emerged in 1994 come from, and to what extent was the leadership rooted in the experiences of the 1980s jihad as carried out in Loy or greater Kandahar? How did this movement change during its six years of rule in Afghanistan, whether as a result of internal or external influence? What were the sources of the movement's power within the country, and to what extent were these cultural, religious or political?

This is a study of what the Taliban movement themselves have issued as statements of their identity (from political messages to statements with cultural resonance) as opposed to research borne out of rumour and guesswork. It is a study of ideals (and their compromise) and how these strands have shifted and changed over time, taking as a primary assumption the fact that the Taliban are not a static entity.

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"As an independent country, Afghanistan has been forced to wage a sanguinary war for the attainment of its identity."

Mullah Mohammad Omar, November 2010[1]

"One half of the Koran is fine, the other half we write ourselves."

An Afghan in conversation with Willem Vogelsang[2]

"The religious scholars are the light in this world
They are the guidance for all humanity
If the chemist seeks the best match
The friendship of the religious scholars is the best chemistry
In the companionship of the religious scholars, one becomes gold
Even if you are a stone or a grain of sand in the desert
I, Rahman, will keep the company of the religious scholars
Whether they are young, middle aged or the elderly"

Pashtun poet Rahman Baba, quoted in *Tolo-ye Afghan* newspaper, April 1995[3]

1. Omar, 2010.
2. Vogelsang, 2008, xi.
3. Moosa, 1995.

1. Introduction

"I just love the feel of a PK heavy machine gun in my hands," Sikander Gul says.[4] "You haven't tried it? Really, you should, it's the best feeling in the world. TAK....TAK...TAK…"[5] He mimes with an imaginary gun. Sikander Gul is an occasional Talib, not fighting for money — fighters affiliated with the Taliban movement do not receive salaries, in any case — but out of boredom. The camaraderie and excitement of an attack once every so often is enough for stories and tales weeks afterwards. Sikander Gul's fight isn't a *jihad*. It's weekend sport.

He comes from one of the districts west of Kandahar City and his occasional off-on relationship with the Taliban fighters in the area he grew up means that he will sometimes fight against the foreigners. However, these days he is trying to make some money from American and Canadian donors by doing construction work for them.

This is a different picture from the one that is usually painted about the Taliban and their motivations for fighting. According to one version of the stereotype — there are many — the Talib fighting among the vineyards and natural trench systems of southern Afghanistan fights out of a hatred of foreigners. His beliefs are a throwback to those of his forefathers in the nineteenth century, another war, but — analysts suggest — perhaps not so different after all.

Sikander Gul is representative of so much that we do not understand about the conflict that rages in Afghanistan — about the blurred lines between the people, government and the insurgency, or how people like Sikander Gul can cross easily between these seemingly different poles. These fundamental misunderstandings about the present situation come from a failure to properly parse the history and roots of the Taliban movement, roots that date back at least three decades.

4. The name has been changed to protect the identity of the interviewee.
5. Interview, Kandahar, September 2009.

(a) Histories of the Taliban

Much has been written about the history of the Taliban movement as a way to explain the latest phase of conflict that has unfolded since 2001. These histories take 1994 as the start date and almost all derive their analysis from a limited number of secondary-source accounts of that period.[6] The first half of Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban* is a good example of this.[7]

It is time for an update, however, since time has proven both the value and defects of these sources. Some offer unique first-hand observed information or include excerpts of interviews conducted at the time. This is useful for a historian trying to reassess the Taliban pre-2001, but unfortunately, the proportion of those explaining their understanding of the Taliban from personally-observed experience is tiny.

Most take a political angle, assessing the issues that affected the international community during this period: the rise of opium cultivation, international terrorism or the proposed plan for an oil pipeline, to offer a few examples. A few assess the Taliban from a military or organisational standpoint, attempting to explain the movement's position from the way it formed its armed forces, for example, or how it attempted to administer its rule over the populations that came under its control as years passed.[8] A new genre of exculpatory memoir has emerged since then, in which Afghan and Pakistani actors involved during those years attempt to outline their activities and interactions. This includes Talibs, members of Pakistan's political establishment, as well as international actors, most of whom attempt to score political points through the publication of their memoirs.[9]

The Taliban have been a polarising movement, too, forcing extremes of opinion and wildly contrasting analyses since their emergence onto the international stage from 1994 onwards.[10] Accordingly, motivations of authors seeking to explain the Taliban's

6. See Coll, 2005, Griffin, 2000, Gutman, 2008, Loyn, 2009, Marsden, 1998 and Wright, 2006.

7. Rashid, 2010.

8. Sinno, 2009; Maley, 1998.

9. Muzhda, 2003; Murshed, 2006; Mutawakil, 2007; bin Laden *et al.*, 2010; Zaeef, 2010; Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011; Agha, 2014 are all examples.

roots and agenda have been extremely diverse. To be specific, pre-conceived political prisms seem to direct the focus of research.

These prejudices are compounded by the very real difficulties that confront researchers attempting to understand the Taliban: a language barrier requiring significant investment of time to pass through; all the problems that come with attempts to conduct field research inside southern Afghanistan and meet with representatives of the Taliban, both then and now; a disinformation campaign actively pursued by all kinds of actors in the conflict; a cultural barrier even harder to penetrate than that of language; and the intrinsic complexity of the topic and the issues that surround it.

Histories written at the time — even by authors with the best access — had limitations. The Taliban were too sweeping a topic to cover, even when your research included trips inside Afghanistan pre-2001. The mixture of religious, political, historical and economic explanations needed better data, and above all the words of the protagonists themselves were mostly missing from the story. We learnt about a movement that was claimed to be "Deobandi" in religious outlook, but we were not told very much about what that meant.[11] We learnt about the leadership who had all attended madrassas and studied Islam to some degree, but we were told nothing of what they studied.[12] We read of the "informal" nature of the Taliban's government structures and processes but were told few specifics beyond one or two anecdotes.[13]

The consequences of this misunderstanding were manifold, and they continue to influence those seeking to engage with the Afghan conflict. A misunderstanding of the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda soured the relationship between the Taliban and the international community (amongst other things). These corrosive misreadings continue to muddy the water, influencing regional actors' positions towards the Taliban and helping stymie the possibility of political reconciliation. A failure to understand the movement has meant that billions of dollars were spent fighting a war in ineffective and sometimes counterproductive ways.

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10. Contrast Madsen *et al.*, 2002 with Riedel, 2008.
11. Matinuddin, 2000, chapter 2; Roy, 1990, 57-58; Dorronsoro, 2005, 50-52, for example.
12. Rashid, 2010, chapter 1.
13. Gohari, 2001, chapter 4.

(b) Research questions

Given these problems and the inherent complexity of the subject, therefore, this study of the Taliban attempts a new assessment of the sources and outcomes of Taliban identity from 1979 until (but not including) the attacks of September 11, 2001.

What were the sources of their identity as a group? Moreover, how was that identity formed and how was it expressed throughout the period of their rule over Afghanistan in the context of the Taliban's internal governance efforts and their outreach to external actors, 1996-2001?

There are various sub-questions for each part, but the core of this dissertation seeks to assess the main strands that made up the Taliban's sense of who they were and then to examine what this meant for how they ruled the country. I do not seek to offer new theoretical paradigms for understanding the Taliban, but rather, using original and up-to-now unpublished primary source documents, to answer the research questions descriptively.

(c) Theoretical assumptions

This research makes several assumptions about identity that it is worth mentioning upfront. These come from the theoretical literature, and the detail offered in subsequent chapters offers substantiation of these baseline points.

First, identity is not taken to be static, but fluid and multipolar. I will describe the Taliban movement's identity, but by doing so, there is no implication that the individuals who were part of it always behaved that way, or that institutional identity must necessarily mirror the individual identity of its members. Changing circumstances and contexts mean that different (or even opposing) poles of identity can exist in one entity at the same time. In fact, these internal conflicts can often spur the development and change of identity. Talking about identity almost always involves a false construct: beyond abstracted characteristics, about which more below, it is impossible to pin identity down beyond a specific subject, moment and context.

Another way of looking at identity used in this research is to see it as a process; in this way, identity is seen as a 'becoming', and identity is never finalised as long as the entity is alive and subject to the world around it.[14] These changes are in part the expression of choices taken by participants/actors among the Taliban (or in reaction to the choices taken by others). Additionally, the choice not to act is still a choice.

As a corollary, identity is seen as a mix of abstracted characteristics that all contribute to 'Taliban identity.' Multiple elements will be foregrounded at different times during what follows, but not all of them need to be present in a single entity at a single moment. The process of 'becoming' is one in which these characteristics are symbolically constructed. These symbols are constructed through language and abstraction within people's minds. Symbolically-constructed abstractions allow for the assumption of predictability in society and one's interactions with others.[15] These characteristics have been called "social norms" by others, and are understood as "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain social behaviour without the force of laws."[16]

Third, identity is a construct. A variety of processes go into how it is shaped — whether through internal negotiation or in definition against external 'other' entities. Moreover, the constructed identity can be inherited; accordingly, tradition is an important part of how identity is passed down to new generations, even though everyone reinterprets the traditions differently. This internal negotiation can be within individuals or groups, and within groups or institutions it can take place at an elite level of discourse or from the bottom-up.

With a nod to ideas initially discussed by John Searle, this dissertation not only focuses on the written output of the Taliban but also on their actions. There is a complementary relationship between the two, such that every act may be a speech, but

14. Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 206.
15. Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2245.
16. Cialdini and Trost, 1998 (p. 152) in Biel and Thøgersen, 2007.

every speech is also an act.[17]Social norms within an institution are changed by "norm entrepreneurs."[18]

Fourth, an internal-external dialectic is often instrumental to how identity is constructed; which is to say that identity is sometimes constructed on the basis of a desire **not** to be like something rather than a positive choice to be something. Some, like Margaret Mead, have even gone so far as to suggest that identity is not possible without assuming the point of view of another or 'the other.'[19]

> *"Defining 'us' involves defining a range of 'thems' also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves."*[20]

Social scientists like Tajfel saw interactions with other groups as making up a significant component of how collective identity is formed.[21] A sense of competition and favouritism towards one's own group is said to encourage a uniformity of thought and action. Originally proposed by Brewer and Miller in 1984, this can happen through a process of 'decategorisation.'[22]

For the Taliban, the late 1990s were filled with moments where their identity was contrasted against that of another individual or group. Their identity as a movement began to firm up and become explicitly clear the more they interacted with external actors. Major events — as this research will show — even prompted significant rethinks of who they were and what they stood for. Accordingly, both internal negotiation and oppositional identity-forming processes were displayed by the Taliban.[23]

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17. Searle, 1965. Also see the interview with Bruce Lawrence on the 'New Books in Islamic Studies' podcast (http://newbooksinislamicstudies.com/2015/08/10/bruce-b-lawrence-who-is-allah-unc-press-2015/ (accessed December 7, 2015)).
18. "If they are successful in their endeavors they can produce what he calls norm bandwagons and norm cascades which lead to substantial changes in social norms" (Sunstein, 1996).
19. See chapter four of Jenkins, 2008. He is talking about 'self-consciousness', but it applies to our discussion of identity.
20. Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1604.
21. Ashmore *et al.*, 2004; Hogg, 2001.
22. Hewstone *et al.*, 2002, 589; Humphreys and Brown, 2002, 751.
23. Note that oppositional identity is not the only mechanism of identity formation: "words such as

Fifth, identity is negotiated through a process of classification.[24] The Taliban were obsessed with classification, with trying to find labels and procedures that would allow society — they believed — to better conform to God's precepts. This was a discussion among elites of the movement, and it also included aspects of oppositional identity as previously mentioned.

Sixth, a system of classification often leads to an exploration of the boundaries of identity; indeed, negotiations of identity take place "on the boundaries."[25] Just as the Taliban discovered much about who they were when viewed in opposition to others, extreme positions taken by individuals within the movement allowed for a reflexive assertion of identity following exposure to these extremes.[26] Internal group dynamics can generate its own sense of collective identity, moreover. Humphreys and Brown, 2002, suggests that dialogue is the organisation itself.[27]

Finally, there are different levels of identity, from collective (institutional or group) down to that of the individual. This research will move through these to give a sense of

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'response' or 'defence' should not be misconstrued to imply necessary sequence. They do not mean that communal identity, the shared sense of living in and as a community, is absent until, one moment, along comes the outside world to conjure it up. There will always have been an 'outside world', even if only the next village. However, the outside world's salience, its power and size, and its perceived distance and difference from 'us', may all change. In the process, as part of an ongoing dialectic of collective identification, community may be more explicitly stressed and practices of communal symbolisation and differentiation increasingly called into play in the solidary affirmation of similarity and the defence of perceived collective interests" (Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2198).

24. "*Without classificatory systems, social life is unthinkable.* Every social group has such a system or systems, some competence or participation in which is a criterion of practical group membership. Inter alia, classification systems focus our *attention on boundaries*: of the group, of acceptable behaviour, of purity, of humanity, of whatever. *Issues of classification are always issues of identification.*" [My emphasis] (Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2375).

25. Cohen, 1985.

26. Lamont and Molnár, 2002.

27. "Organizations are socially constructed from networks of conversations (Ford 1999) or dialogues (Hazen 1993; Rhodes 2000) the intertextuality, continuities and consistencies of which serve to maintain and objectify reality for participants (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Dialogue is a process whereby people 'mobilize language by talking, listening and constructing meaning' (Rhodes 2000: 217) and is understood here not merely as 'a process in an organization, but organization itself' (Hazen 1993: 22). To an extent, the practice of dialogue promotes shared understandings (Senge 1990: 242), permits negotiated realities (Bonnen and Fry 1991) and leads to a degree of collective consistency, coherence and continuity (Burgoyne 1995; Isaacs 1993). However, it is clear that organizations are not discursively monolithic, but pluralistic and polyphonic, involving multiple dialogical practices that occur simultaneously and sequentially (Ford 1999; Hazen 1993; Fairclough 1992). Within organizations, individuals and groups have some latitude to author their own reality, though always in ways shaped by the available social discourses." (Humphreys and Brown, 2002, 422).

the whole. The focus will be how collective identity shaped the individual identity of actors who were taking actions.[28] Identity helped shape paths towards actions that were taken, and a better understanding of these roots of identity will allow for a better appreciation of why events unfolded as they did. Note that institutional identity was and is as much a product of conscious choice as it is of habit; the actions taken by individuals on a regular basis play a significant role in shaping that institutional identity.[29]

(d) Research thesis

Social identity is a fluid and multi-layered concept that not only influences the personal trajectory of an individual but underpins the evolution of all forms of social organisations. The relative importance of different parts or layers of one's identity can inform decisions, solidifies alliances and leads to open conflict at times. A person might be from a specific ethnic group, a country, a region, a tribe, a village, or a religious sect. At times, he might regard himself as being from a particular sub-clan when in the presence of fellow tribe members, while at others, the importance of the sub-clan might not matter in the face of another, different tribe. Politics, time and again, have played an important role in shaping identity. The Taliban — the individuals and the organisation that came together in 1994 — have a particular and distinct identity that has been shaped and influenced by several events as well as the experience of individuals, institutions and situations.

This study identifies three broad categories of these influences — religious, cultural and institutional — that were important to the Taliban during the period examined. These different emphases shifted in response to events and actors, however, and it is the intention of this work to disaggregate these responses and show the processes at work behind the superficial manifestations of this identity.

28. This process is, of course, bidirectional.
29. Duhigg, 2013; Berger and Luckmann, 1967.

(i) Roots

The Taliban's roots lie in the Hanafi Deobandi religious tradition, in which the various members and leaders were educated. The movement that emerged in 1994 was a local movement, one concerned with issues close to home and lacked any internationalist or global agenda. This agenda shifted and changed as time passed, and as those involved in leading the ideological tenor of the movement themselves changed in reaction to circumstances and their interactions with others. They were a group that previously had no voice and negligible power within the political alignments of the day, but soon occupied a position where their opinions and decisions were heard; this inevitably changed the self-perception of the leadership.

The Taliban pre-2001 were a group with a long history, one that technically extended back as long as there were religious clerics, and as long as Afghanistan existed as a country. The past hundred years or so can be taken as the frame for the most recent segment of this story; the religious clergy was not immune to the new ideas of Muslim solidarity and revivalism that swept through other parts of the Muslim world in the early and mid-twentieth century. This Deobandi tradition was not depoliticised, however, and the forebears of those who sought to impose order on the chaos of southern Afghanistan during the mid-1990s had become increasingly involved in local politics. This was largely a process of instrumentalisation, but it would set a precedent for later developments. In this sense, the heritage bestowed on the religious students who came to form the Taliban movement was religious, political and cultural. Religion, however, underpinned much of the movement's identity and transcended other cultural and political influences for the most part.

The relative calm of the early 1970s was disrupted by ideological disagreements and open clashes between Communists and Islamists in Kabul. By 1975, there was a full-fledged Islamist attempt to overthrow the government (spearheaded by Hekmatyar and Massoud) and *fatwa*s were issued calling for *jihad*. Nevertheless, it took the unpopular and disruptive land reforms along with the strong-arm tactics of the Communist government to turn the predominantly rural population, in particular

those living in southern and eastern Afghanistan, against it.[30] Resistance spread throughout the country, and the Communist government under Taraki and later Amin used strong-armed tactics against the traditional rural leadership. Tens of thousands left their homes, crossing the borders of Pakistan and Iran. The resistance, however, would gain much traction and attacked the Soviet 40th Army that arrived on December 24, 1979.[31]

Already in the late 1970s, the Communist government had tried to subdue parts of the population and to enforce its reforms — disappearances, arbitrary arrests and executions were common — thereby contributing to the establishment of the first *mujahedeen* fronts that took up arms in a concerted way against this government following the arrival of Soviet troops.[32] In southern Afghanistan, some of the first to fight were members of the religious clergy originally from the districts west of Kandahar City.[33]

(ii) *Jihad*

Local mullahs, following the call to *jihad*, converted their madrassas into fronts, leading their students into battle.[34] While the organisation of the mujahedeen fronts was initially hazardous, a distinct meta-structure developed in the first year that would soon be forced under the umbrella of seven officially-recognised *mujahedeen* fronts. The groups of religious students, or *taliban*, would emerge as independent front line groups, embedded into the wider *mujahedeen* structures.[35] They would come to play a different role than other mujahedeen groups; they were closely associated with the Islamic courts that they operated in Afghanistan during the *jihad* and where they

30. Interviews; Zaeef, 2010; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a; Agha, 2014.

31. Edwards, 2002; Dorronsoro, 2005.

32. Interviews; Zaeef, 2010; Agha, 2014; Gumnam, 2014; Gumnam, 2016.

33. Interviews; Zaeef, 2010; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a; Agha, 2014; Gumnam, 2014; Gumnam, 2016.

34. Interviews; Zaeef, 2010; Gumnam, 2014; Gumnam, 2016.

35. This dissertation makes a distinction between small-t 'taliban' and large-T 'Taliban'. The former are those who were engaged in religious studies and also those involved in the fronts of the 1980s; the latter refers to those associated with the movement that took the name 'Taliban' in 1994.

dispensed *shari'a* justice. These developments predominantly took place in Afghanistan's southern and eastern regions.[36]

The experiences of the *jihad* were the single-most significant near-term influence on the young religious students' sense of identity. The transformative impact is difficult to overstate. It would inform much of the identity of the group that would later emerge as the Taliban in 1994, individuals who regarded themselves as belonging to one group with a shared identity separate from those around them.[37]

The experience shaped the Taliban's identity in several ways. The trenches created a sense of fraternity, one far more tangible and durable than just growing up with other students and receiving an education at a madrassa or other religious institution. Moreover, their identity was shaped by witnessing the transformation and disruption of society at large, the sidelining of the old tribal hierarchy, in which military strongmen or charismatic religious leaders eclipsed these traditional structures, in part simply due to their presence in Afghanistan instead of being in Pakistan, away from the fighting. Their status was elevated in other ways, too, particularly from the power their leaders wielded in the religious courts which fulfilled an important function throughout the 1980s *jihad*, in particular in southern Afghanistan. In a blend not uncommon to what would emerge in the mid-1990s in the south, Mullahs would set up structures that would provide conflict mitigation and pass judgements, issue edicts and fatwas, often primarily concerned with issues that arose between different mujahedeen groups and factions or among the local population.[38]

The overarching principles of the local interpretation of Islam that informed much of the early Taliban's activities and structures — especially the frequently-voiced aspiration to transcend tribal and ethnic lines — would also come to play an important role in the evolution of the groups that joined to form the Taliban movement. This lay the seeds for much of the movement's coherence and appeal that would, in turn, generate support from the local population.

36. Dorronsoro, 2005; Loyn, 2009.
37. Mutawakil, 2007; Zaeef, 2010; Agha, 2014.
38. Interviews, Kandahar, 2008-10.

(iii) 1990s

The departure of the last Soviet soldier from Afghanistan in 1989 and formation of the mujahedeen government in Kabul were moments of victory (and celebration) as well as sorrow for the losses of the war.[39] Around the country, a tentative optimism was felt, and those who had spent much of the last ten years fighting could take a breath and pause.

The taliban who had fought against the Soviets did not see themselves as the driving force of future political developments or as the people to implement what they had fought for, namely an Islamic state. The taliban waged a *jihad* as much *against* something as they did *for* something. Their *jihad* was a defensive one, not an 'offensive' one that would put in place a new government.[40] One should not forget that much of the clergy already regarded Afghanistan as an Islamic state prior to the tumult of the 1970s.[41]

The individuals who would come to form the Taliban in 1994 were largely passive in the years leading up to the formation of the movement and did not play a significant role in the local power-games among different mujahedeen commanders and factions. In particular, the senior leadership of the Taliban, dominated by actual students who had not finished their religious education or were 'village mullahs', went home or turned the *otaq*s back into madrassas in areas where they had fought during the 1980s.[42]

The cessation of government funding from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan meant that many of the groups associated with the Taliban also had close to no more support, having already received significantly less attention during the peak of the *jihad*. Like the taliban fronts themselves, support wound down. The Soviet withdrawal had been made possible by an ambitious militia program that was supported by the provision of

39. Zaeef, 2010, chapter 6.

40. See Bonney, 2004, 111-126 for more on the history of this distinction and how it has been used by others.

41. Interviews, Kandahar, 2008-10.

42. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2007-11.

large amounts of money.[43] With foreign interest dwindling alongside a reduction in Soviet funding, many of the commanders saw their power decline. Looking for alternative sources of revenue, they would turn on the population. It was these processes that caused a disintegration of society at large, one which would directly precipitate the Taliban, called upon by their own communities to take action.[44]

The insecurity and lawless atmosphere that developed during the early 1990s in southern Afghanistan was cause for those involved in the 1980s mujahedeen fronts to come together to discuss possible solutions. Most of the mullahs and religious students were at home in their villages, and they began a discussion process that took many months before it transformed into action.[45]

(iv) 1994

In 1994, a small group of Taliban mobilised against criminal gangs west of Kandahar City. This early group was a local group reacting to the situation in its area. It mobilised around a blend of local culture and a literalist interpretation of Islam to try to impose order on a chaotic situation. At the time, there was little concern for anything beyond immediate and local circumstances.

(v) 1994-2001

As the movement gathered momentum, it advanced from Kandahar province to Zabul, on to Helmand and Uruzgan, capturing Herat in September 1995 and Jalalabad and Kabul in September 1996. The five years that followed saw the Taliban struggle to conquer central and northern Afghanistan and consolidate their hold on the country and its diverse population while imposing highly conservative social policies. The Taliban's unprecedented rise was in part enabled by external support by the

43. Cordovez, 1995; Grau and Gress, 2002.
44. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2007-11.
45. Zaeef, 2010; Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2007-11.

government and security apparatus of Pakistan and the arrival of madrassa students from across the border.[46]

The group of students and former mujahedeen fighters that banded together in mid-late 1994 considered western Kandahar their area of operation; all the discussions that took place in the months prior to taking up arms concerned this (relatively) small area. Once they had taken it, however, representatives from other communities in the surrounding districts began to arrive to ask the religious clerics and students to expand into neighbouring and farther areas.

What was initially a few dozen became one hundred, two hundred men. A key moment came when they had to decide to split their forces — one half moving east and the other west. The question of intent is important here: to what extent did the movement intend to expand outside Pashtun areas? Or to what extent were they following the old mujahedeen plan from the late 1980s?[47] With the benefit of hindsight, it seems to have been a combination of factors: momentum was spurred by Pakistan's provision of support in the form of transportation and materiel, coupled with a feeling among those who participated that they were engaged in a 'good work' in terms of their provision of security and justice.

The Taliban's offensive was stopped outside Kabul where their forces remained in a stalemate with Hekmatyar and then Massoud's troops. They moved into the Jalalabad/Nangarhar area to the east in the second week of September 1996, and it was at this point that the movement 'inherited Osama'. Despite some claims to the contrary, bin Laden and the Taliban knew very little of each other — they had not fought together during the 1980s, and Mullah Mohammad Omar even seemed unaware of developments in the Arab world relating to bin Laden and the ideology he had begun to represent.[48]

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46. Rashid, 2010; interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2007-11.

47. This was a plan put together by southern (mainly Kandahari) mujahedeen who were frustrated by the dysfunctional nature of the interim government and planned a capture of the whole country from Herat to Kabul.

48. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2007-11.

Aside from the issues over bin Laden, the Taliban were facing serious bureaucratic problems: the more they expanded, the more they were expected to offer some form of governance or at least an expanded version of their sparse 'security and justice' agenda. They were not bureaucrats, however, nor did they possess the capacity needed among their ranks. In order to fill positions and satisfy the increasing demand, the Taliban relied on bringing back old civil servants who had worked in previous administrations. Not all of these agreed with the Taliban's various stances, whether religious, cultural or political. The rapid expansion of the movement, the lack of a coherent plan or understanding of how to create or govern a country, paired with the large intake of a diverse set of individuals; this meant increasing internal strife, conflict and turmoil amongst the Taliban's ranks.

The Taliban, at the beginning of August 1998, were in the middle of an increasingly large-scale war with various forces in the north of the country.[49] The government that had formed in Kabul and Kandahar, meanwhile, was facing growing internal difficulties with a seemingly uncontrolled influx of personnel staffing ministries and official positions. The different commanders that had joined the movement, moreover, expected recompense and feuded with each other over influence within the administration. Problems were mounting and exacerbated by the lack of expertise and competence of much of the Taliban leadership. These Kandaharis had little or no experience in running an administration and brought with them a pronounced drive to break with old structures.

Their military campaign had stalled in the north and the Taliban had shown themselves to be as ruthless as other mujahedeen factions in their military campaign conducted in the central region of Afghanistan; they had closed off all access points there, which caused a severe famine for the local, predominantly Hazara (also *shi'i*) population, in an effort to subdue them.[50] Furthermore, the northern front line saw widespread atrocities carried out by both sides.[51]

49. Large-scale in terms of weapons and troop numbers deployed.
50. Rashid, 2010, 77 and 55ff.
51. United Nations, 2005.

Each new territory meant the acquisition of a fragile network of brokered deals and conflicts within local communities, fuelled by the Taliban's rigid application of social policies, much of which was derived from their understanding of the workings of Pashtun communities in rural southern Afghanistan. This changed internal dynamics significantly and overextended the limited abilities of the Taliban's bureaucracy.

Interviews with former officials involved in the Taliban's administration at that time unanimously state that there were two priorities back then: the ongoing '*jihad*' (i.e. bringing the rest of the country under their control) and — for some — starting to make Afghanistan under the Islamic Emirate function as a real country.

On August 7, 1998, two near-simultaneous bombs struck American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Close to 300 people were killed — mostly Kenyans and Tanzanians, not Americans — and over 4000 were injured.[52] Bin Laden's threats and statements had finally found an expression in a public way. This was a serious issue for the Taliban movement at the time: the 'political' Talibs — some had already voiced their concern over the presence of bin Laden — were worried that the United States would now use bin Laden as a scapegoat for any future attacks on the United States, and others, who weren't sure whether bin Laden was responsible, said that if he was it would be a catastrophe for the movement. The subsequent cruise missile strikes — 79 in total — on August 20 offered conclusive proof of their position. Bin Laden was — they believed — a strategic liability for the movement and they sought to convince Mullah Mohammad Omar of this.

In 1999, the United Nations imposed a sanctions regime — resolution 1267 — which unilaterally targeted the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[53] Coupled with a failed attempt to encourage the Taliban to expel bin Laden from Afghanistan brokered by Saudi Arabia, the embassy bombings were a turning point for the movement in terms of its international relations. The movement's social policies had already started to provoke considerable international condemnation and the isolation that resulted meant many in the leadership started to turn inward.

52. Coll, 2005; Bonney, 2004, 124.
53. United Nations Security Council, 1999.

By 2001, therefore, relations between the Taliban and the international community had deteriorated to the point where suspicion and mistrust characterised interactions. Even internally, the Taliban had not managed to provide an interim solution to the country's problems. The United Nations had nominally taken on the responsibility for the provision of emergency food aid — unwilling simply to pull out of Afghanistan — and the second year of a drought had further devastated conditions for the broad mass of Afghans around the country.[54] There were 1.15 million people internally displaced by mid-2001[55] and international assistance organisations had slowly been isolated and restricted throughout 2000 and 2001; this had taken place in part on account of Taliban intransigence and pressure, and in part as 'principled' withdrawals of funding or programmes in the face of the Taliban's social policies. In this environment, it seems Mullah Mohammad Omar saw bin Laden as an ally at a time when no one else was offering support, as well as an important bridge to the wider Muslim world.

Bin Laden had already set in motion the September 11 plot by this time; the Hamburg 'cell' had made his acquaintance in Kandahar and had been dispatched back to Europe and on to the United States.[56] The al-Qaeda head was firmly on a course of confrontation with the United States. January 2000 saw a failed al-Qaeda attempt to bomb the USS Sullivans and a successful attack in October on the USS Cole.[57]

All of this was happening independently of Mullah Mohammad Omar and the Taliban movement. Bin Laden's agenda was different from the Taliban, who were still making some final attempts to garner legitimacy and support from the international community. Bin Laden's interests in Afghanistan were pragmatic: he needed a base from which to conduct his operations and Afghanistan — host to a number of jihadist organisations and actors — was a good base in which to ensnare the United States when they finally reacted to his provocations. The September 11 attacks that followed

54. United Nations , 2002.
55. Gutman, 2008, 229.
56. McDermott, 2005; Kean and Hamilton, 2004.
57. Mohamedou, 2006, 52.

would, he hoped, bog the United States down in a prolonged military conflict in Afghanistan when a reaction came, as he believed they might.[58]

The seven years of Taliban rule did not see much that could be characterised as stasis or stability. They seemed to lurch from crisis to crisis and their work to expand the territory covered by the movement occupied their attention to the very end. This was especially true for Mullah Mohammad Omar, who, in the deeply centralised leadership model he had adopted, insisted many decisions pass through his office before receiving the official imprimatur. This meant that there was little opportunity to generate strategic direction. As this dissertation will show, improvisation and chance played a significant role in how the Taliban responded to events happening around them.

This brief overview describes the evolution of the Taliban's identity and the influences upon the movement and the individuals within it, in particular those that its leadership was subject to. The Taliban's identity — from the early beginnings, the experience of the *jihad*, to the formation of the movement in 1994, the inheritance of bin Laden and the increasing involvement in international relations — saw vast changes in how they behaved in and in how they understood themselves. They sought to construct an identity that would be fostered and carried forward, although at times they were themselves subject to cultural, religious and political influences that would shape their identity in a reactive and unguided manner.

(e) Components and sources of Taliban identity

This study analyses the Taliban's identity 1979-2001 from three separate, albeit intertwined, perspectives: religious, 'cultural' and institutional. This sub-division roughly corresponds to different 'institutions' within the Taliban movement and separate discursive fields within each. Each of the three quite different types of discourse had separate vocabularies, separate hierarchies within the movement and

58. Tawil, 2011.

separate purposes. The division into the outlined three categories derives from work with primary source material alongside field research and interviews.

This is, therefore, a categorisation that derives from the Taliban's own activities and statements. Within the Taliban, there was considerable resistance to this trend. While a new group of diplomats and bureaucrats sought to create a space within which to chart Afghanistan's future, Mullah Mohammad Omar and others within the leadership tried to play down distinctions between the religious and the political — or the institutions that defined both. Indeed, some of the most symbolic and powerful/potent moments and statements from during the Taliban's rule come when the distinction was blurred; Mullah Mohammad Omar's assumption of the title *amir ul-mu'mineen* is perhaps the best example of this — a mosque was the site of what was directly a merger between religious and political spheres of activity.[59]

Crews has proposed the notion of the Taliban as "popular intellectuals" and this fits with the findings of this study.[60] The Taliban movement became, however accidentally, norm entrepreneurs within South Asian Islamic discourse and the debates that their existence and actions have generated continue to this day.

(i) Religious

The Taliban are, above all, characterised as an Islamic movement, one in which religion infused all aspects of their political activities. But what did they seek to implement in religious terms, and how did they justify these?

On one level, this is an easy aspect of the Taliban's identity to address, the one on which most work has been done in the past, which is to say, on the role of the religious clergy within Afghanistan. The Taliban were, admittedly, a new and revolutionary manifestation, but many of the movement's edicts could have been predicted since the

59. Note that the distinction between religion and politics is not something foreign to Muslim thought. Al-Maturidi was writing about the distinction between *diyanat* and *siyasat* in the early tenth century CE in which he delineated the prophetic authority (*diyanat*) from the political authority (*siyasat*) (Kutlu, 2004).

60. Crews, 2011, 347.

issues about which the Taliban cared had not changed much from previous concerns of rural clerics and communities.

On this religious discourse, there is a lot of information to review: transcripts and recordings of the senior Taliban leadership's mosque sermons, statements that address specific religious issues, and a whole host of edicts and laws. Several religious clerics within the movement — and many outside, like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, for example — were prolific writers on matters of religion, producing *tafsiraat* of the *Qur'an* or smaller instructional books advising on the tenets of 'a good life.' Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s produced a surfeit of these smaller booklets, itself a hint of the lack of distinction made between the spheres of public and private when it came to issues of morality.[61]

There are also, although many date back several hundred years, a set of core texts that are used as part of religious education (in madrassas, but not exclusively so); this is an important set of documents in that, in this way, there is a considerable degree of standardisation across the country and because these were de facto the source texts that inform the Taliban's worldview and ideological stance. For southern Afghanistan, the influence of Deobandi religious teachings was omnipresent. This initially came from the seminary in India, but was then transmitted by teachers and scholars in Pakistan and Afghanistan who had been instructed in the same way.

In many ways, the religious sources that fed into the Taliban's identity are the easiest to quantify and the easiest to situate, since the institutions and contexts in which this discourse took place had long existed and the outlines of which are, at least, well-known. One new development, however, was the way power created some bleed-over effect on issues of morality; in the past, the clergy would have had a say in these issues, but they did not have an enforcing mechanism.

61. These smaller booklets are in fact more interesting since they are filled with quotations of poetry and other cultural notations. These roughly correspond to the Arabic- and Farsi-language collections of *bon mots* that became popular during the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries.

(ii) Cultural

The cultural roots and influences on the formation of Taliban identity are not much covered in previous accounts. This is partially a language issue — there are few translations of relevant source documents — and some aspects are only accessible through field work and interviews. Furthermore, the topic is difficult to approach in the context of the Taliban and defies easy categorisation.

Cultural influences refers to the personal/private sphere for the most part — how individuals relate to the outside world and how they express or interpret that relationship.[62] This thus encompasses the poetic output of Taliban members as well as their ethnic roots.

There are a large number of sources on this aspect of the Taliban's identity, although much of it has so far not been systematically analysed. The Taliban's relationship to their Pashtun ethnicity is a complicated issue but for the moment, it suffices to note that they were a movement largely made up of Pashtuns rather than a 'Pashtun movement'. The distinction is important. As such, some norms and standards were imported — into the way they conducted themselves, into the way they sought to interact with others — but it was not the defining influence. In part, we find a conflict of identities, between the religious and the cultural. As will be examined in this study, this underlying conflict, the changing nature of the Taliban's identity that saw parts of the group, in particular the leadership, favouring the religious over others, would create considerable strife between the Taliban movement and the Afghan population.

The poetry written by members of the Taliban is an extremely useful body of sources. It extends back to the nineteenth century, both in terms of actual sources as well as the stylistic traditions (which go back even further). Individuals would express their opinions and feelings, giving a rare glimpse at subject matters of hurt and pain, as well as love and honour.[63]

62. Crews and Tarzi, 2009, chapter 3.
63. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b.

This poetry is not edited or mediated by committee in the way that statements or officially sanctioned laws are. This is, therefore, an extremely useful way of accessing and coming into contact with the emotional output of Taliban members, both young and old. It covers the entire period being studied here.

The Taliban's poems cover a wide range of themes and styles: the political often brushes up close with the aesthetic; the celebratory cry is never far from the funeral dirge and praise of martyrs lost. They are almost always personal and also filled with emotional pleas. These poems or *tarana* are one of the most striking and vivid symbols of who the Taliban are. They are important to consider and to be used to build a full portrait of the movement and those inside it.

Analyses that seek to chart the tribal makeup of the Taliban's leadership therefore only tell part of the story.[64] There is, for example, an argument often made that the Taliban are representative of a Durrani-Ghilzai schism, one that dates back hundreds of years and that what we see now is a manifestation of that core conflict.[65] The tension between Durrani and Ghilzai branches of the Pashtun tribal structure certainly exists — and existed during the period being examined here — but there are other underlying causes which can also explain why certain tribal groups are found in larger numbers within the Taliban's leadership structures.

On the socio-economic level, there were factors that encouraged certain groups from southern Afghanistan to send at least one child to be educated in a madrassa — 'one child for God' — if not more. This became a tradition within families and by the 1990s there was a clear prevalence of this tradition in certain tribal communities. This wasn't a function of the tribe, however, and subsequent conflicts with those who had not passed through the madrassa education system were thus not on a tribal level. In this way, the relevance of Pashtun influences on the Taliban plays a more distinct role for the individual member actions rather than those of the group.

64. Johnson and Mason, 2007, 76-79.
65. Johnson and Mason, 2007.

(iii) Institutional

'Institutional' is taken here to include all activities that are related to the state, from political aspirations to official representations. The distinction between an organisation and an institution is that an institution is the reified, concrete version: something that is organised together and that relies on certain specific ways of seeing and talking about the world. In the context of this Ph.D., the Taliban's institutional identity encompasses the dynamics of social and political choices they made.

The sources of the Taliban's institutional identity include all official documentation relating to the state such as speeches, laws, press releases, internal files from within certain ministries (of which there is a certain amount available) as well as state-sponsored media outlets.

(f) Mechanisms of Taliban identity generation

As we have seen in the brief overview of the period being studied here, the Taliban's identity was subject to change, change that came from both within and without the movement. This shifting nature of Taliban identity was one of the defining features of the movement during the 1990s; the more they expanded, the more responsibility they took on. The evidence is far more suggestive of a group improvising in response to a diverse set of internal and external problems, rather than a group with a fixed sense of identity and a programme for how this would manifest itself.

Identity is, in any case, difficult to pin down, even when there is clear intent to define and express that identity. Identity is a set of characteristics or categories that make up a certain thing; the definition and application of these characteristics or categories imply something static, but identity is not fixed. There were some attempts by the Taliban to outline what they stood for — and more as the years passed — but few of these were products of a systematic consultative process among the leadership.[66] Rather,

66. The constitutional review board that operated during the late 1990s was perhaps an exception to this.

individuals occasionally were interviewed or offered statements outlining their sense of who they were as a movement, or where they saw the country in the medium- to long-term. Given the problems they faced as leaders — as all leaders of Afghanistan face — it is not difficult to imagine why there was no mood of reflection or broad analysis of this kind; they were too busy responding to day-to-day concerns.

One of the underlying reasons that have made it difficult to assess and understand the Taliban's identity is the secretive nature of the movement itself, even to the extent that they have actively discouraged the interest of outsiders in the inner workings. Interviews with the senior leadership were rarely given — Mullah Mohammad Omar himself was seldom interviewed by a non-Afghan or non-Pakistani journalist or researcher — and there does not seem to have been any serious initiatives for transparency with regards to finances or government appointments. Little is known, too, about the inner workings of the central leadership group that was dominated by founding members.

There are also relatively few written sources — and of those that exist, most have never been used — relating to the Taliban movement. This meant that huge assumptions were often made on the basis of individual statements or public stances. This worked to the detriment of our understanding of the Taliban. In this environment, sourcing for the precise details of certain transactions, meetings or activities is often circular in nature.

A Newsweek article written by Steve LeVine in October 1997, for example, stated that, "Afghan and Western sources" had claimed bin Laden gave the Taliban $3 million for their final push on Kabul and which allowed them to go the extra mile.[67] By 2001, Peter Bergen took this article as fact and stated that "[bin Laden] gave the Taliban $3 million at a critical moment in 1996 as the religious warriors geared up to take Kabul."[68] By 2009, Gretchen Peters is writing that:

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67. "Yet suddenly they were rolling in cash and confidence. On Sept. 27 the Taliban marched into Kabul. Former mujahedin commanders close to the Taliban say the bonanza arrived courtesy of Osama bin Ladin, a radical Saudi national wanted by U.S. Justice Department officials on suspicion of having bankrolled several major terrorist attacks, including the truck bombing of the U.S. military barracks in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. Afghan and Western sources say bin Laden's gift to Omar amounted to $3 million" (LeVine, 1997).

"The Saudi exile wasted no time in ingratiating himself with Afghanistan's new masters, helping to bankroll their takeover of Kabul. Bin Laden reportedly put up $3 million from his personal funds to pay off the remaining warlords who stood between the Taliban and the Afghan capital. The cash injection came at a crucial time, and Mullah Omar would never forget it."[69]

The evolution of what started out as vague speculative statements which end up as supposed 'facts' that does not even cite the ambiguous origin anymore presents an interesting and — in the case of scarcely-covered subject matter such as the Taliban movement in the 1990s — challenging problem. There is a need to revisit and unearth primary source material and, where possible, conduct field research. Understanding the decisions of the Taliban and their leadership — such as their refusal to hand over bin Laden or their implementation of social policies throughout Afghanistan — can only be approached through a consideration of their social identity, the environment among the Taliban and the events that influenced their evolution.

(i) Improvisation / chance

Improvisation and chance played an important role in the generation of policy within the Taliban, one that has not been properly acknowledged in the literature. The 1994-6 period is a case in point. With almost no experience of this kind of political mobilisation or manpower that knew how to administer the new territories that came under their command, the Taliban reinstated many old government functionaries to keep departments above water.

While it differed from area to area, many individuals who took over departments had a sense of self-reliance and confidence which saw them taking action in the particular domains which they had taken over. This frequently was expressed in the reliance on crutch or fallback positions. Either they used old Afghan government policies from previous governments or tried to find precedent in Islamic practice or tribal custom.

68. Bergen, 2002, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 3366-71.
69. Peters, 2010, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1430-5.

Failing this, there were instances where simply no action was taken until senior advice was forthcoming.

Chance is a feature of policy-making around the world, but it was this hollowness (particularly in the early years) at the core of Taliban policy that meant chance had a far greater influence when compared to other countries. Random events happen to everyone, but many have made plans or have some sense of analogous precedent that can help them navigate issues. For the Taliban, events like the Indian Airlines hijacking in 1999 helped shape foreign policy in a somewhat haphazard manner.

(ii) Moral drive

Despite the conclusion of this study that moral compulsion has often been overstated in explanations of what is behind the Afghan Taliban's identity, some consideration of the ethical implications of actions taken (as well as how they fit into individuals' moral self-conceptions) was necessary for the Taliban and their members. Not only did officials want to do things according to their teaching, but there was an ethos (from Mullah Mohammad Omar down) of wanting to be *seen* to be doing what was Islamically proper and correct. Accordingly the extent to which that moral drive would influence the decision-making process would correspond to the extent to which it had been made public and open for all to view.

(iii) Conflict

The argument that the Afghan Taliban developed many of their policies out of opposition to external parties or interventions is compelling. Certain sources fed into the religious clerics and students' conceptions of themselves and into the official line that they took as a group post-1994, notably the religious and cultural influences. They were Muslims of the Hanafi Deobandi tradition above all, and Pashtuns from southern Afghanistan — this applies more to the leadership than the rank-and-file — second. Other allegiances then followed, but their underlying religious orientation and

education along with their strong ethnic identity (and with that, their cultural roots) mark essential foundations of their identity.

The Taliban's identity was multi-layered and changed significantly over the decades covered in this study. Much of the Taliban's decision-making process was reactionary in nature, and often decisions were provoked by external forces. Decisions, however, while a function of the Taliban's identity and self-conception, also impacted on the process itself — when they took decisions they de facto ruled out other paths to take in the future. This needs to be seen in the context of the underlying religious identity that needed to be highly consistent, albeit not static.

The Taliban sought to institute more forward-planning in terms of their foreign relations, for example, but these advisory bodies were never able to escape the fact that Mullah Mohammad Omar was based in Kandahar — they were in Kabul — and was harder to influence on these matters.

For internal issues — the conflict that erupted between the Taliban's forces and Afghan commanders from the north, for example — there was much more of a sense of vision or the end goal in the way the Taliban's leadership took action. Inside Afghanistan, they were much more adept at understanding how to manipulate the situation on a local level and in understanding the effects of their actions. Internationally, however, they lacked this understanding and were thus forced to retreat into a series of 'principled' stands on a whole variety of issues that they were forced to confront; these ranged from bin Laden and international terrorism, to the discussions over a proposed oil pipeline.

(iv) Internal debate

Taliban identity was not just a matter of responding to external influences, however. There were distinct groupings within the Taliban, who were different from each other, and as outlined above, often had considerable conflicts. Parts of the leadership, and early members, presented a distinct group, with different understandings and aspirations to others.

Within the Taliban there was a certain amount of autonomy for actors and groups who sought to forge their own path, both in terms of their ideas of state, but also in moral issues. Of course, the two sets of ideas were intertwined to a certain extent in the minds of the Taliban's leadership, but a small group of diplomats and mid- to lower-senior level bureaucrats were concerned with finding a way to reconcile the moral aspirations of the Taliban movement with the realities of being a functional state within the international system. They had to find a way to deal with their increasing power and their new political role within the country.[70]

This was as much an exploratory process for those involved as anything else — previously the direct political role of the religious clergy was as spoilers or as legitimisers of decisions already taken.[71] They took their cues from a variety of sources: the limited nature of the Taliban leadership's / diplomatic corps' contact with the world outside Afghanistan meant that this process was subject to a great deal of chance.

The Taliban orientated themselves according to already-explored and existing decisions and documents, such the guidance and direction provided in Islamic sources — especially on constitutional law, for example — as well as a certain amount of precedent in the methods and style employed by previous Pashtun rulers, such as Ahmad Shah and Abdur Rahman.

(v) External influence

There was, too, an element of international influence on the Taliban's policies and identity. Pakistan is perhaps the clearest example of this — an actor that sought to influence the Taliban movement out of self-interest.

External actors had a significant impact on the changing nature of the Taliban's identity. The shared identity and long-established ties with peer groups helped, but, as we will see, also increasingly changed the movement in concert with the change that could be found among the *ulemaa*' along the border region between Afghanistan and

70. Interviews, Kandahar & Kabul, 2010.

71. Olesen, 1995; Haroon, 2007.

Pakistan. A strong, stubborn streak among Taliban 'elites', however, meant that external direction was not as simple as issuing a command and the Taliban blindly following orders. The United States, too, helped define the Taliban's identity through oppositional processes.

(g) Methodology and sources

This reassessment of the sources and realities of Taliban identity during the pre-2001 period takes as its basis both the existing set of sources available in English as well as a new set of Arabic-, Pashtu- and Dari-language sources that the author (along with some colleagues) has collected from within Afghanistan. These are a mixture of published as well as unpublished documents that offer an unprecedented opportunity to encounter the Taliban on their own terms, using language of their choosing and reacting and responding to the minutiae of local governance and international relations during the period of their rule post-1994.[72]

I reviewed the English-language literature that assesses who the Taliban were pre-2001, but my goal is to bring to light and to use new sources in order to come closer to an understanding. Former and current Taliban affiliates have only recently started to record their own testimonies on the events that took place during their lifetimes in a systematic fashion and in books, but there are other sources that can be used to understand the movement. Specifically, newspapers and magazines published during the late 1990s that offer more granular detail and commentary from Taliban leaders in their own words as events were unfolding. A significant group of Taliban lives in Kabul at the present moment; they present an opportunity to gather anecdotal and incidental material for context to events and trends about which we currently know very little.

It has become more and more difficult to conduct fieldwork and research given the deteriorating security situation across Afghanistan and with the increasing

72. The Taliban Sources Project is a joint effort by Anand Gopal, Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn (in conjunction with Thesigers) to collate, digitise and translate primary source documents associated with the Afghan Taliban movement. More information can be found at talibansourcesproject.com.

fragmentation of the insurgency, but there are still open channels to current members or people who have maintained strong ties. This allows for questions to be posed.

These sources allow for a far fuller and rounded portrayal of the Taliban as individuals and as a movement. It is only through understanding the interacting viewpoints of those in the senior leadership — as expressed in statements, poems or internal memos — that one can arrive at an understanding of why certain decisions were taken and get more of a sense of their identity. It is not enough to view the Taliban through an Islamist lens, or a Pashtun lens for that matter. This study argues that the Taliban's identity was subject to change, with different groups and individuals following different paths in the ever-changing environment the movement found itself in throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

These processes continued after the watershed moment of September 11, 2001, and a nuanced and detailed understanding of the evolution of the Taliban and their identity will prove to be a valuable and instructive exercise for the present situation.

This thesis is divided into two main sections. The first analyses the main sources of identity that fed into who the Taliban were. Chapter 2 outlines the religious inheritance both through the prism of the Deobandi-flavoured education many senior Talibs received as well as the context and circumstances of the time. Equal space is given to ideal-type formulations of the education and the practical lived experience in which this took place.

Chapter 3 uses the term 'culture' as a broad category within which to examine the literary and symbolic inheritance (and production) associated with the Taliban. The movement's association with the Pashtun ethnicity is also briefly examined here, mainly in terms of their cultural inheritance rather than how it manifested itself during the years of Taliban rule.

Chapter 4 examines the institutional and political context to the Taliban, particularly during the years before they came to power formally between 1994-6. The impact of the 1980s *jihad* on how they functioned and saw themselves as a group is highlighted

here. This is followed by an overview of the systems of political action that they inherited and that they had to manoeuvre after they took power.

The second of the two main sections relates to the mechanisms through which the Taliban chose to behave once they were in power. It relates to the choices they made and the reasons for those course corrections.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse internal mechanisms for mediating their identity as they ruled the country. The Taliban had ways of formulating policy that were internal to the movement. This was in part a product of structural forces — their upbringing and particular context — but they brought new aspects to how they governed. In particular, the role of improvisation and chance is an important factor in this regard that has previously been neglected by scholars. The overview of mechanisms is followed by several short case studies, showing this internal policy generation in the context of the movement's formulation of the state, their education policy and their cultural policy.

Chapters 7 and 8 in turn analyse the movement's external mechanisms through which their identity was expressed through their actions and policy decisions. These discuss the points of external interaction, whether with fellow Muslims from various countries or the international community (either on a diplomatic level or via representatives of aid agencies and so on). Chapter 8 examines several short case studies that will help illustrate the conceptual presentation in chapter 7. These deal with the Indian Airlines hijacking that forced the Taliban to play on the international stage (albeit briefly). I also examine the Taliban's relationship with bin Laden and the various foreign fighters based in Afghanistan, and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and what this says about how policy was made.

In the conclusion, I summarise the key findings of this study. I also discuss some of the key implications for the Taliban movement in the present day, as well as offer some suggestions for colleagues and prospective researchers working on the history of the Afghan Taliban movement.

Part I: Sources & Inheritance

2. Aspects of a Deobandi Education

This chapter begins the description of the three core areas that fed into the Taliban's collective identity. Religious practice and belief are, of course, important, though we should caution against too strong an emphasis on it as something that can completely explain who the Taliban were.[73] Note the distinction between religious practice and belief. This is relevant for the Taliban in that certain aspects of their religious beliefs will be manifested as practices / deeds and some are only in word.

A brief overview of the role that Islam plays in Afghanistan, I will focus on the Deobandi tradition and the kind of education that senior figures within the movement experienced. This is then followed by the first part of a glimpse into how the 1980s war started to change the direction and import of the education students or *talibs* were receiving.

Throughout this chapter, the description will focus on the relevant factors that went into the development of the group of individuals who would later become the senior leadership of the Taliban movement and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. As such, the period on which we will focus begins in the mid-twentieth century and continues through the 1980s *jihad*, during which many figures came of age and received the bulk of their (semi-)formal Islamic education.[74]

73. See Cavanaugh, 2009.

74. 'Semi-formal' on account of the circumstances of their education (in trenches and such) rather than as a reflection of the methodology.

(a) Religious Experience and Practice in Afghanistan

(i) Islam and Hanafism

Hanafi Sunni Islam is the main denomination practiced in Afghanistan. The CIA World Facebook's 2009 estimate states that 99.7% of the population are Muslim and that the Sunni population is between 84.7-89.7%).[75]

Islam is a common influence in that almost everyone in the country is a Muslim, but it would be wrong to infer that this brings a unanimity of opinion. Islam is not a monolithic entity, and in Afghanistan encompasses a wide range of different interpretations — from reformists, foreign-educated progressives, Salafists, Deobandis, Talibs, conservative judicial scholars and so on. All of these can be pro-government or anti-government (or sometimes both), pro-West or anti-West. There is no uniformity of opinion.

The Islamic landscape in southern Afghanistan was and remains very homogenous. Internal conflict between Muslim groups because of their ideological points of view[76] was seldom heard of in the countryside in southern Afghanistan during the years when the Taliban elites were growing up. The most that one could find of this sort of conflict would be the occasional clash between two dominant sects, the Sunni and Shi'a, although this was mostly the product of ethnic tensions or land disputes rather than a specifically religious dispute. Conflict among Muslims on a tribal basis, however, was very common.[77]

Muslims in Afghanistan are predominantly from the Hanafi *madhhab* or tradition.[78] This has been the case since Islam's arrival in the territory from the seventh to tenth centuries. The Hanafi *maddhab* coalesced around Abu Hanifa in the early eighth

75. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html (accessed December 7, 2015). The precision suggested by this estimate is deceptive; no reliable population estimation surveys have been carried out in Afghanistan for decades.

76. Within Islam. Of course, the 1980s *jihad* was, in part and on one level, a dispute between Islam and Communism.

77. Interviews, Kandahar and Khost, 2007-2010.

78. Roy, 1990, 30; Olesen, 1995, 33.

century though it was a tradition more of place than person.[79] Key characteristics of the school as a whole were to the centrality of the core sources of revelation and guidance: that is, the Qur'an and the Sunna. Abu Hanifa himself — as the nominal founder of the first of what would become four Sunni schools of jurisprudence — was instrumental in starting to address concerns as to the legitimacy of the sunna.[80] There were serious concerns with the forgery of parts of the hadith tradition, the reporting of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad.[81]

The Taliban's emphasis on the Hanafi legal school puts the Taliban at odds with Salafists, which is interesting, given the kinds of support they had during the 1990s, and the kinds of interactions. Salafis tend not to express preference for a particular *madhhab* or legal school, unless they state that they are Hanbali, which is seen as a sort of proto-*madhhab*, in any case.

Hanafism was the de facto legal position taken by the Taliban and by their judges. An examination of Taliban legal documents by Dorronsoro (2005) showed that "these generally followed the precedent of the most traditionalist Afghan *ulema*, with no notable innovations. Most of the measures promulgated derived from the *hadith* collected by Ismail al-Bukhari (who died *circa* 870), which served as the basis of Islamic law in Afghanistan."[82] This was the basis for some of the more contentious aspects of the Taliban's government, including the use of punishments such as amputation and stoning, although even these were not completely uncontested among the Taliban's legal elites.[83]

In Afghanistan and for the Taliban, the Hanafi lens was (and still is) the main lens through which Islam was taught, experienced, and practiced. The Deobandi pedagogical and interpretative tradition is the main way most are exposed to this

79. Nadwi, 2010, 57-58; Melchert, 1997, 32-38.

80. Nadwi, 2010, 58-63.

81. Nadwi, 2010, 59-64; Brown, 2015, 39-41.

82. Dorronsoro, 2005, 283-284.

83. "A number of women were stoned for adultery in spite of the disapproval of many of the ulema. The practice had been abolished before the war and been infrequent since, with only one reported case in Badakhshan" (Dorronsoro, 2005, 284).

Hanafi tradition. As such, it has certain characteristics that are unique to Afghanistan, or unique in their specific combination as found there.

(ii) Sufism and village culture

Sufism is an important strand of thought and practice within Islam.[84] Three centuries after the beginning of Islam, it emerged as a reaction to the tendency towards increased legalism from scholars, judges and clerics. Most major religions have had a tendency towards spirituality, and Sufism — with its claims to preference a direct relationship with God — was Islam's version of that spirituality. Rather than an emphasis on written texts as the source of authority in the religious experience, Sufism makes a claim for personal experiences and the numinous.

Previous scholarship on the Taliban has tended to refer to the movement as a sort of antithesis to Sufism. In this manner, Sufism is posited as being a tendency towards peace and being a non-violent, almost-secular version of Islam.[85]

This explanation ignores a long history in which Sufism has been used to mobilise communities in anti-colonial struggles or insurgency movements, for example.[86] There isn't space here to detail this relationship in any detail, but suffice it to say that it is useful to start from scratch where it comes to the Taliban's relationship with Sufi practice and culture.

There is a long tradition of Sufi thought to extend back to the tenth century CE, in which individuals from what we now conceive of as Afghanistan (or the Khorasan area, as it tended to be known then) played a prominent role.[87] Regarding the practical experience, Sufism manifests itself firstly in brotherhoods or *tariqat*s. These are groups associated with certain individuals and their philosophies of practice or thought. Inside Afghanistan, the Naqshbandiyya and the Qadiriyya are two prominent groups,

84. Green, 2012.

85. Jenkins, 2009; Tharoor, 2009.

86. See, for example, Abl al-Qadir in Algeria, Usman dan Fodio in Nigeria or the numerous associated leaders following Imam Shamil in Chechnya.

87. Lizzio, 2014, chapter 2.

though there are a dozen or so others with not-insignificant numbers of adherents. The leadership of such groups is passed down through a mix of family ties and student-teacher lines.[88]

On an everyday level, Sufism can be found in shrines dotted around the country. The belief in the healing intercessionary power of saints and the shrines where they are buried is a common belief across rural Afghanistan.[89] There are various micro-customs associated with the belief in saints and the use of shrines related to healing, including the use of *tawiiz*, *tsasht* and/or *dam* as protective amulets or to heal certain injuries or to ease certain pains. Some shrines are associated with fertility.[90] Thursday evenings are when *zikr* ceremonies are held across the country, some at the prominent shrines, some just at private gatherings/houses.[91] The *zikr* is a vital part of the Sufi practice around the world; it is where the adherent/adjunct comes into contact with the divine, with the numinous experience, and it is the practical and lived component to the theoreticisations of the philosophers. In Afghanistan's recent history, it is this practical experience of Sufism that has generally been the way many interact and come into contact with it.

It was common for rural Afghans to draw insight on matters as diverse as wedding arrangements to warfare to eschatology from their dreams; Mullah Mohammad Omar was famously guided by his dreams, in the manner of Sufi pirs.[92] In fact, as a child Mullah Mohammad Omar received education from Sufi teachers such as Hajji Baba; later, as the Taliban's supreme leader, he would visit his old teacher's grave almost weekly.[93]

The Sufi themes of the dreamworld and mysticism would remain Taliban preoccupations throughout the Emirate period. The following is an example from an interview forum (almost like a Taliban advice column) with the influential Taliban

88. Haroon, 2007; Lizzio, 2014.
89. Roy, 1990, 37-38.
90. Dupree, 1980, 104-105.
91. Roy, 1990, 38-40.
92. Edgar, 2006.
93. Dam, 2014.

'Alim Mawlawi Abdul Ali Deobandi, one of Mullah Mohammad Omar's most trusted ideological advisers on the question of the intercession of saints:

> *[Question] How about people who say that holy persons are present and watching us. Do holy personages hear us and are aware of everything we do?*
>
> *[Answer] O' Bab Sahib or Paw Mikh or Padshah Agha [Important Kandahari Sufi Saints]. When one uses these kinds of expressions it is because they are of the belief that holy personages are present and will help him. They are dead and can't be present. But you can pray for them and ask them to help you with blessing of the prophets and solve your problems*[94]

The pir-murid relationship, and the preponderance of Sufi holy men, mendicants, and itinerant preachers, meant that everyday religious practice in the countryside was deeply intertwined with Sufi rites and beliefs. In southern Afghanistan, these rites continued unabated during Taliban rule.

As I will show in chapter three, poetry is an important part of the Afghan cultural experience, and, by extension, that of the individuals who lead and fight for the Afghan Taliban. Many of the prominent writers and philosophers associated with Sufism in previous centuries are often also known for their poetry and allegorical tales.[95] This literature of Sufism — some of it in Arabic, some in Persian and some in Pashto — forms a significant part of the curriculum studied by religious students.[96] The requirement to memorise these texts means poetry written to and for the Taliban finds fertile ground in their cultural experience.

Anyone growing up in southern Afghanistan during the 1960s and 1970s would certainly have been exposed to Sufism, but there were other practices and features of life that are more tangentially related to Islam: a belief in the power of miracles, enhanced by the experience and folklore surrounding the 1980s war; and the groups of individuals known as *paylouch* (Pashto: literally, "the barefoot ones"). The *paylouch*

94. Deobandi, 1997.

95. See, for example, the works of Ibn 'Arabi, Hafiz or the tales associated with the character known as Mullah Nasruddin.

96. The *panj ketab* (which means 'five books' in Dari) include a translated version of the classical Arabic collection of stories Kalila wa Dimna, for instance.

were a self-ordained warrior class blended into a certain thuggish personality.[97] Notorious for being able to withstand various trials and pains, they came into their own during the 1980s under the leadership of Hajji Latif, a commander based in Mahalajat in Kandahar.[98]

This was the environment in which people grew up before the 1980s war regarding their general education. I will now detail some of the specifics of the education received by the religious students and scholars.

(b) "A Deobandi Education"

'Talib' literally translates as 'religious student.' When talking to members of the Taliban movement for the first time, many began their remarks by stating this fact, and it is one that is useful to remember. These religious students have been present in Afghanistan for centuries; indeed, one way of looking at the history of state formation through Afghanistan's twentieth century is to examine how rural people met the government's struggle to expand influence out into the provinces through education.

The education system in Afghanistan is split between religious and secular options and has been for many years. This thesis will focus on those who encountered the religious side, but it is important to be aware of the secular tendency, if only because the Talibs themselves saw a need to push back against this very impulse. There was covert competition between the two for decades, and it took the outsized effects of the 1980s *jihad* to force one firmly ahead of the other in terms of adoption rates, enrolment and absorption into the general society.

From the early twentieth century onwards, successive leaders attempted to set Afghanistan on a course of reform through the establishment and expansion of a secular school system and by increasing control over non-state schools. The first secular boys school was set up in 1903 in Kabul, followed by a girls school in 1921 and

97. Interviewees often describe members as inhabiting the conceptual mid-space between 'thug' and 'gangster'.

98. Maley, 1998, 15; Roy, 1990, 41; Forsberg, 2009, 14; Dorronsoro, 2005, 110.

an attempt to gain control over the informal religious schools.[99] The encroachment on the traditional schools formed the focal point of the conflict between the conservative countryside and the small but growing urban centres.

The secular education system was expanded during the 1950s and started to directly challenge the traditional educational system. This, in turn, saw an increase of resistance to the formal system by the village Mullahs and 'Ulemaa.[100] State education, as with other reforms that radiated out from the small urban centres, was met with suspicion. Rural Mullahs in particular, who appear to have been opposed to new policy proposed by the central state almost by default, were most vocal in their denunciation of the new state schools.[101] From the outset, the debate would often come to focus on girl's education, foreshadowing the 1990s.[102]

The secular system was rolled out by the central state through weak but advancing formal institutions of the small urban centres and cities.[103] This education was accompanied by other modernisations and reforms — fledgling attempts by the central government to gain control over the rural periphery — but these were met with suspicion. Rural Mullahs in particular, who appear to have opposed new policy proposed by the central state almost by default, were the most vocal in their denunciation of the new state schools. Until the 1970s, however, the state managed to stay on track with their pursuit of slow and gradual change, navigating the communities' resistance.

By 1965, some 358,000 pupils attended state primary schools, and the total enrolment in the state education system reached over 400,000.[104] The following decade saw a massive expansion, with the number of enrolled students doubling. Among the general population, secular education had garnered widespread support and had been growing steadily. Even in the countryside there appears to have been calls for this improved and expanded secular schooling. The Communist takeover of the

99. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 15.
100. Roy, 1988, 106; Giustozzi and Franco, 2011, 1.
101. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, chapter 2.
102. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 5.
103. Roy, 1988, 108.
104. Emadi, 2002.

government happened slowly and then suddenly following Daud's coup of July 1973. This popular support for the secular system then vanished.

The backbone of education in rural southern Afghanistan in the 1970s and before was the local Qur'anic village schools, the *dar ul-hefaz*, sometimes referred to as the *hujra* system.[105] These were small bare rooms (*hujra* means 'ground-floor room' in Arabic), often attached to a village mosque. The curriculum different widely depending on the individual cleric or teacher in charge and his level of education. The syllabus was simple and religious studies dominated, but some of these places offered basic reading and writing. The reading, in particular, was provided to encourage students to begin their work to learn the Qur'an by heart.[106]

After this basic education, students would travel to study in other institutes with better-qualified teachers, since those were rarer yet in the villages.[107] This could be a formal madrassa complex or a private religious institution, but the number of these were far and few between. This was one of the reasons some students travelled to Pakistan since teachers were generally better qualified and greater in number across the border.

State-run schools offered a third pillar inside Afghanistan. While some within the Taliban leadership attended these schools, they were considered suspect and many left these and transferred over to the religious system as the 1970s progressed, as their agenda of politicisation and induction into the state became clearer.[108]

Indeed, educational reforms were one of the causes of rebellion fomenting from the mid-late-1970s. Secular schools were quickly identified as being responsible for the change in the attitudes of Afghan youth. The Soviet Union invested heavily in the Afghan youth, with several thousand being trained back in the schools of Moscow and beyond.[109] They restructured the university and identified Qur'anic schools as places of

105. Literally 'house of memorisation', from the Arabic.
106. Matinuddin, 2000, 12-16.
107. Roy, 1990, 45.
108. Zaeef, 2010, 8-11; Giustozzi, 2010, 10-13.
109. Dorronsoro, 2005, 63, 84.

opposition. Teachers in particular, as records from Kandahar city show, were not only directly targeted but had also started to carry weapons.

As stories and documents from the early 1980s show, the educational reforms that the Communist government implemented were clearly perceived as a threat, and the schools and teachers became considered legitimate targets and enemies of Afghanistan. Here is one example of an Afghan fighter who conducted target killings within the city of Kandahar:

> *""May the houses of most teachers be ruined because they are plagued with damnation," the young Ghaffari added. A teacher is meant to be a guide but most of the teachers in our community hang devious titles on their chests. Our homeland expects a lot from the teachers; the foundation of society is connected to teachers. Any role that teachers play also has an impact on society, so when a teacher is devious or has gone astray, then society will be spoiled and such a teacher's death is legitimate and should be carried out just with a dull knife blade. Most of our misfortunes have been due to these sinister and country-selling teachers.""*[110]

Competition between the state and the religious educational systems would continue after the 1980s war was concluded, and the Taliban in power would attempt to roll out a massive expansion of their preferred system across the country, partly in response to this realisation of the power of gathering adherents at an early age.

(i) The role of Islam pre-1980s

The groups of religious clerics that were to aggregate together in Kandahar during the 1980s to form *mujahedeen* fronts against the Soviet Union were not a new phenomenon. Afghanistan and Pakistan — and for these issues of the intersection of religion with politics we must take both into account — have a long history of the mobilisation of religious students and their teachers in the service of various causes.

The Afghans who fought the two Anglo-Afghan Wars of the nineteenth century were mobilised on a religious basis. Abdur Rahman — the so-called 'Iron Amir' — ruled Afghanistan up to the turn of the century and had instituted measures to strengthen

110. Gumnam, 2014, 80.

the state. He identified the legal system as the primary element requiring reform — which is to say, against the influence of the tribes who tended to operate centrifugally against the state — and to do that he needed to change the education provided by the state.[111] Abdur Rahman sought to coopt and include the religious clergy as part of his new government system as they had traditionally been involved in education and previous instances of popular mobilisation.

The reign of Habibullah bore the fruit of Abdur Rahman's efforts. Internally the country was at peace, but outside influences worked against this end-goal. Habibullah invited Mahmud Beg Tarzi and his family back to Afghanistan. Tarzi, a western-orientated nationalist, gave new impetus and focus to the "nationalist constitutional anti-colonial movement" within Habibullah's government.[112]

Amanullah, to cement his hold over the various tribes and clergymen, declared *jihad* against England and promised full independence. His success greatly benefited his status, in particular among the religious clergy that had originally favoured his brother Nasrullah as king. Nevertheless, Amanullah followed Habibullah and tried to introduce an ambitious reform programme — styled on and inspired by Atatürk's reforms in Turkey — throughout the country.[113] This was broadly secular in nature, and while some of the changes were sorely needed, Amanullah lacked the military clout to enforce his programme, since he no longer had British funding. Fatwas were issued by clerics across the country (although particularly in the east and south-east) and the religious clergy revolted in the mid-1920s. These uprisings were also seen in communities of the eastern provinces, with tribal support from Pakistan.[114] The religious uprising was not a homogenous group, however, and Amanullah's policy of patronage towards certain *pir*s and clerical families in Afghanistan and Pakistan paid

111. See Olesen, 1995 and Roy, 1990 for a more detailed account of this transformation.

112. This can be seen as part of a continuing tradition of Deobandi stirrings in the eastern provinces, as exemplified by the Akhund of Swat, Hadda-i Sahib and the 'Indian Wahabism' of Shah Waliullah and Sayyed Ahmad Bareilly (Olesen, 1995, 108).

113. Olesen, 1995, 131-133.

114. Nawiz, 1999.

off. Despite the government's eventual victory, the religious clergy had proved that they still held sway over parts of the population.[115]

The 1930s saw an attempt to increase government control of the religious clergy. The *Jami'at al-Ulemaa*' ('The Society of Religious Clergy') was created in 1931 and this provided a formal structure through which the state could begin to rein in the clergy. Nevertheless, religious leadership remained an independent power that Nadir Shah, who ruled Afghanistan from 1929 until 1933, had to honour. The appointment of Fazl Omar Mujaddidi, from one of Afghanistan's prestigious religious families, as Minister of Justice was thus a concession to that fact.[116]

During the 1930s and 1940s the government of Nadir Shah and his son, Zahir Shah, opened madrassas in every province in an attempt to extend its control over religious education around the country. In 1938-9, the Qadiriyya Sufi *pir* Mohammad Sadi al-Keilani was encouraged to mobilise the religious clergy to restore Amanullah to the throne.[117] He even secured the cooperation of the Faqir of Ipi, another Qadiriyya *pir* based in Waziristan who was waging his own campaign against the British. Al-Keilani, however, was bought off by the British at the last moment and he returned to his home in Damascus, bringing the campaign against Zahir Shah to a halt.

In 1952, a *Shari'a* faculty was established at Kabul University; this was carried out in cooperation with Cairo's well-respected Al-Azhar University and was an important first step in the rise of an educated Islamist elite among Afghan clerics.[118]

The 1940s and 1950s saw a shift away from the use of religious discourse as a means for popular mobilisation. The Safi rebellion (1945-6), the Mangal unrest (1959) and riots in Kandahar over the enforcement of taxes for landowners (also 1959) all failed to receive religious support from the prominent clerics. As Olesen notes:

115. Roy, 1990, 54-68.

116. The Mujaddidi family was one of the prominent religious families of Afghanistan (Olesen, 1995, 185).

117. Olesen, 1995, 193-194.

118. Olesen, 1995, 192.

"The popular religious discourse, which throughout the period 1880-1930 had been dominated by the concept of jihad, had changed after the pan-Islamic fervour had died out and the legitimacy of the ruler was unchallenged. [...] This change in religious discourse may possibly also be ascribed to a generally higher level of scriptural learning among the religious personnel as a result of the massive build-up of new government madrasas. It was accompanied by a gradual replacement of the pir, whose position depended upon the veneration of his followers, by the alim, who owed his education and employment to the government."[119]

A new constitution was approved in 1964 and clashes over the progressive political stances being espoused in parliament dominated the 1960s. Attempts to emancipate women[120] met with strong resistance from the clergy, including one well-known instance where religious vocabulary was employed in a poetic ode to Lenin.[121] Clashes of this kind became increasingly radical as members of both sides were killed (including one member of the religious clergy in 1972).[122]

Indeed, the 1970s were a key period in the establishment and fracturing of the religious opposition and political parties.[123] These debates in Kabul, however, had relatively little impact and were not as fiercely contested in southern Afghanistan as they were in Kabul. Some clerics were working together with the government, who tried to encourage others to join up, but it was by no means as fiercely disputed as in Kabul.

The ideological debates of the capital were far from the concerns of the village *mullah*s and *mawlawi*s and it was only the arrest and disappearance of many fellow clerics and the edicts attempting to implement land reform and changes to the educational status quo that led to the issuing of fatwas and calls for resistance against the government. The crucial element in the mobilisation of the general public of the south and its religious clergy, though, was the arrival of Soviet troops in Afghanistan in 1979-1980.

119. Olesen, 1995, 196-197.

120. Unveiled women were attacked with acid. Unlike in the 1920s when protests had stopped reforms from being passed, or 1959 when the issue of unveiling caused a riot in Kandahar, here the sympathy was with the women who were attacked.

121. Olesen, 1995, 212-215; Edwards, 2002, 39.

122. Olesen, 1995, 216.

123. See Edwards, 2002, 177-278, for a richly-textured account of this period.

Prior to that point there had been relatively little popular local adoption of resistance in southern Afghanistan.

The underlying dynamic of politics and power in Afghanistan, particularly in the south and the east of the country, has been characterised by a rural-urban dichotomy. Cities are drivers of development and change; in southern and eastern Afghanistan they were increasingly a place where the traditional tribal leadership, who sought better education for their children and a better lifestyle, congregated. During the 1970s and 1980s, this traditional leadership was killed, dispersed, or fled the country, and in the course of the *jihad* they were replaced by commanders and strongmen who did not represent the same governing structures as the traditional leadership did.[124] This further deepened the dichotomy, severing naturally-occurring social links between the city and the tribal communities in the countryside.[125]

The rural-urban relationship — and with it the relationship of the population to the central state — shaped Afghanistan's history: kings had tried to modernise the country from the capital but all too often met stark resistance from the rural communities where religious leaders, *mullahs* and *mawlawis* played a more important role than in the city. The real rulers of the rural communities were the tribal elite and landowners, not the religious clergy.

(ii) Where did the Talibs study?

This context is important for understanding where the elites of the Taliban movement post-1994 had come from. Information on the educational background of these core individuals is harder to come by than one might suspect, in part since some who received education in Pakistan now wish to deny that part of their past for political reasons on account of the ongoing conflict. That said, we know enough to describe the following:

124. Pakistan also continued to refuse to allow aid to reach the traditionalist and royalist groups.
125. Roy, 1990, 20ff.

Afghanistan		Pakistan		Mixed	Secular
Hujras	13	Refugee Camp	8	4	2
Madrassa	3	Dar ul-Uloom	11		

Figure 1: Taliban leadership education tally

	Role	Influence	Education	Source
Mullah Mohammad Omar	Supreme Leader	Ideological, Military	*hujras*	interviews
Mawlawi Abdul Ali Deobandi	Kandahar Fatwa Office	Ideological	Dar ul-Uloom Deoband (India)	interviews
Mawlawi Pasanai Sahib	Kandahar Fatwa Office	Ideological, Historical	Nur ul-Madaris (Ghazni)	Interviews
Mawlawi Mohammad Wali	Vice and Virtue Minister	Ideological	*hujras*; Dar ul-Uloom Haqqania post Soviet	Taliban Biography
Mullah Noruddin Turabi	Justice Minister	Ideological	*hujras*	Interviews
Mullah Beradar	Deputy Defense Minister	Military	Madrassa – Kandahar City	Interviews
Mullah Obaidullah	Defense Minister	Military	*hujras*	Interviews; memoir
Mullah Dadullah	Commnder	Military	*hujras*; in Pakistan post-Soviet under Mawlawi Deobandi	Taliban Biography
Mulla Fazl Akhund	Commnder	Military	*hujras*	Interviews
Mullah Mohammad Sadiq	*taleban* Front Commander	Historical	*hujras*	Interviews
Failzullah Akhundzada	*taleban* Front Commander	Historical	*hujras*	Interviews
Mullah Hajji Mohammad	*taleban* Front Commander	Historical	*hujras*	Interviews

Figure 2: Educational background of key Taliban associates

Figure 1 lists the educational background of the senior Taliban leadership. This data was compiled from interviews, memoirs, Taliban biographies, and other sources.[126] Data is available for only 41 of the roughly 150 individuals who served at the ministerial, deputy ministerial, or senior commander positions during the Islamic Emirate period, so this is not sufficient for a representative sample. However, because data is more readily available for senior leaders and prominent figures, the sample over-represents key influencers and top-ranking officials, and under-represents deputy-level and peripheral members. For this reason, we can draw reasonable, if qualified, conclusions: a plurality of leaders' only educational experience was in Afghan *hujras*.[127] The *dar ul-uloom* category refers to those individuals who attended a major Pakistani madrassa or an "institute for the sharia sciences". Successfully completing education in these institutes amounted to something akin to a post-graduate degree, the title of *mawlawi*, which conferred the ability to interpret the hadith and issue fatwas. Examples of leadership in this category include the majority of the Emirate's ulema shura and its supreme court. Those in the "mixed" category refer to individuals who attended *hujras* until the jihad, after which they moved to Pakistan for higher study (during the 1989-1994 period). Examples of individuals in this category include Mawlawi Akhtar Mohammad Osmani, an important frontline commander who later became one of the leaders of the insurgency, and Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rahmani, who served on the leadership council of the Emirate.

However, by far the most important category, in terms of influence, comprised those whose education took place in Afghan *hujras*. This suggests that the oft-repeated story of the Taliban as a product of the madrassas in Pakistani refugee camps is inaccurate. It is true that after 1994, the Taliban's ranks swelled with fresh recruits from such camps, but these individuals rarely reached positions of influence. The prevalence of this layer may, however, account for the origin and persistence of the myth, as journalists working in the field were more likely to encounter such low-level figures than the (generally cloistered) leadership.

126. Some of the research and analysis deriving from this data will be available in a paper published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network in late 2016, co-authored with Anand Gopal.

127. See above for an explanation of what that entailed.

(iii) The Taliban's education

The kind of things that people studied at religious institutions inside Afghanistan is often referred to by a shorthand as 'deobandism'.[128] This is useful in that we have a single catch-all umbrella term with which to group various approaches, but also dangerous in that it implies a certain uniformity that wasn't present on the ground.

Deobandism is diverse as a set of religious principles. Just as it would be strange to believe that all Muslims or Christians have exactly the same exact beliefs (or act upon those beliefs in the same way), so it is that we should not expect those associated with the Deobandi school to be the same. Note, for example, that in February 2008 the original madrassa at Deoband in India held a conference and issued a *fatwa* against terrorism because they were worried that their reputation was too strongly associated with the violence in Afghanistan and with the Taliban.[129] Indeed, it is this diversity of views that allows for flexibility among those educated in these institutions, something that the Taliban have also used on occasion.

It is worth first describing the ideal-type version of Deobandism, the one associated with the physical institution in India, before looking at some of the ways that ideal-type was modified over time.

For southern Afghanistan, the influence of Deobandi religious teachings was omnipresent. This came directly from the seminary in India in the beginning, but then was transmitted by teachers and scholars in Pakistan and Afghanistan who had been instructed in the same way.

First established in 1867, the small religious seminary at Deoband in India would grow and become one of the most influential institutions in South Asia. The religious clergy of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan all would draw a rich intellectual heritage from it over the years; the 'Taliban' movement that emerged in the 1990s was also partly formed in the Deobandi image.[130]

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128. Heck, 2015, 109-111; Abou Zahab and Roy, 2004, 20-21.

129. Puri, 2009.

130. Roy, 1990, 57; Metcalf, 2002; Roy, 1995, 8-10.

When it was originally founded, the school at Deoband was a reaction to Hindu proselytising in the surrounding area. A revivalist trend — given impetus by Shah Waliullah[131] — sought to teach a literal and scripturalist interpretation of Islam in a school that modelled itself on the British educational system. This was so unique at the time that the school's institutional report made continual efforts to explain these innovations to parents.[132] The administrators of the school also attempted to remain independent of government influence, taking donations and endowments from private pockets but refusing to be co-opted.

The school made a name for itself not in administrative changes, though, but through the quality and slant of its teaching:

> *"in this one place, the school claimed, students would be trained in the specialties of the three great intellectual centers of North India: manqulat, the revealed studies of hadith or tradition and Qur'an associated with Delhi; and ma'qulat, the rational studies of fiqh or law, logic and philosophy associated with the two Eastern cities of Lucknow and Khairabad. Basically, the school taught the dars-i nizami, the curriculum evolved at Farangi Mahall in the eighteenth century that spread throughout India. They made, however, important modifications, particularly in their emphasis on the two subjects of hadith and fiqh. […] They deemed hadith, the basis of correct practice and belief, the crowning subject. The most influential teacher was the shaikh ul-hadithat the school; and only good students were encouraged to study the subject. Moreover, the school de-emphasized the so-called rational sciences, logic and philosophy, that had been the chief distinction of the Nizami teaching.*[133]

Many of the students at the school were also affiliated with Sufi orders. As becomes clear when looking at the precise nature of the educational syllabus used by the Afghan religious students, the thrust of the education was not outward but inward. They sought to teach an interior, purified Islam that was self-moderating and self-generating:

> *"Pursuit of these aims required reexamination and restatement of the proper sources of the law - the texts - and recovery of the proper modes of reasoning about them, enterprises in which the Deobandis engaged in common with numerous other "reformist"-tending groups of the time,*

131. A revivalist scholar, Shah Waliullah combined a devoted attention to scripturalist Islam while engaging in local politics and what he saw as encroaching British influence.

132. Metcalf, 1982, 112.

133. Metcalf, 1982, 117-118.

and which led them, as others, to explore anew the limits of independent judgment and of acceptance of past exegetical authority, and to embody the results of this exploration in fatawa (legal opinions) and argument."[134]

There was relatively little desire for political involvement among the early proponents and teachers at the Deobandi school — they didn't even speak out against the British, for the most part — and it was only in the final years of colonial rule (1947, to be precise) that a minority group detached itself from the Deobandists to set up the *Jami'at-i Ulema-ye Islam* to support the Muslim League and their demands for a separate Muslim state.[135] This was the starting position of a trend that would see a political and economic empowerment of many of these Deobandi-educated clerics over the course of the twentieth century.

(iv) Why were Afghans travelling abroad for study?

The school in Deoband attracted students from Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as India, but it was the export of the school's method and scholastic focus to smaller madrassas in Afghanistan and Pakistan that would influence the Afghan religious students the most.

The madrassas created by the Afghan government in the 1930s and 1940s were actually sponsored and linked to the school at Deoband — this was intended to (and did) encourage enrolment — although the numbers attending these institutions were relatively little compared to the aggregate number of religious students from southern Afghanistan based in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[136]

Accurate and complete figures are hard to come by, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there wasn't adequate provision for the sheer numbers of would-be religious students coming from eastern, southern and southeastern Afghanistan. It was normal for rural landowning families, for example, to send at least one of their children for

134. Robinson, 1984.

135. Metcalf, 2002, 12; Nasr, 1994, 111-115.

136. Of course, Pakistan did not exist at that point as a country.

religious education ('one is for the state and one is for God') and many of these went across the border to Pakistan.

Matinuddin quotes Nangarhar's Hajji Qadir that "there were around 2500 spiritual teachers and leaders enjoying a vital leadership role in the village and tribal society of Afghanistan before the failed attempt to introduce communist ideology in Afghanistan", but Pakistan also had a large number of educated teachers.[137] This was even more true following Zia ul-Haq's military coup in July 1977, as he increased funding for a network of madrassas in Baluchistan and NWFP. Dorronsoro illustrates this increase:

> *"From the 1960s both the number of madrasas in Pakistan and the number of students (taliban) had expanded dramatically. Between 1960 and 1983 the number of taliban increased tenfold, from 7,500 to 78,500, and of teachers from 321 to 2,217. There was no slackening in this increase, which was much more rapid than that of the population. In 1988 there were 1,320 madrasas in Punjab, but by 1997 were 2,512 with 220,000 students. In Karachi there were twenty-nine madrasas which educated an average of 2,000 students each year."*[138]

One important reason for the upsurge in enrolment in these religious schools (and the resultant Islamisation of society) was Zia ul-Haq's passing of a new law ensuring that religious students' graduation certificates would be accepted by secular colleges.[139] The so-called 'Zakat Ordinance' was also important in financing the construction and everyday operating costs of madrassas.[140]

These madrassas were not exclusively Deobandi — there were simultaneously Barelvi, *Ahl-e-Hadith* and Shi'i tendencies in Pakistan — but Afghans tended to study at these Deobandi institutions because of their shared Hanafism. The syllabus varied from school to school, but the broad lessons from their Indian parent-madrassa were followed.

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137. Matinuddin, 2000, 13.

138. Dorronsoro, 2005, 276.

139. Haqqani, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2790-2.

140. Brown and Rassler, 2013, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 980.

(v) What did they study?

Matinuddin outlines the basic course structure of the religious education actually received in institutions inside Afghanistan as follows:

> *"The syllabi of these schools included the learning of the Holy Koran by heart; tajweed (correct pronunciation of the Koranic verses); tafseer (interpretation of the Holy scriptures); fiqah (Islamic jurisprudence); shariah (Islamic Laws); ahadis (life and decisions of the Holy Prophet [Peace Be Upon Him]) on various issues brought before him by the faithful); mantiq (philosophy); riazi (mathematics) and falakiat (astronomy); tabligh (spreading the word of God) and a smattering of modern subjects. Shahabuddin claims that the subjects ranged from the Baghdadi Quaida to Bokhari Sharif."*[141]

Interviews on the nature of religious education during this time in southern Afghanistan confirmed the above list, as do a variety of relevant primary source texts.[142]

Many of the smaller madrassas in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan would not have offered such a wide and comprehensive education, however. By all accounts, the standard of tuition was uneven and of a generally poor quality, often just amounting to a place for religious students to stay and attempt to learn the Arabic text of the Qur'an by rote (most times without understanding its meaning). This is the *hujra* system, a place where students could learn the Qur'an and possibly some other basic precepts if they were lucky with the Mawlawi running the particular institution.

(vi) *Dars-i Nizami*

The main approach associated with the Deobandi school was still very much the Dars-i Nizami developed by Mawlawi Nizamuddin in the early eighteenth century, in which *ma'ana*, *aqa'id*, *fiqh*, *mantiq*, *nahw*, *'usul*, *tafaseer*, *hadith* and other Islamic subjects

141. Matinuddin, 2000, 15.

142. Mutawakil, 2007; Zaeef, 2010; Agha, 2014. Interviews, Kandahar, October 2009 and January 2010.

were taught.[143] Each year would see students studying particular books from the Islamic canon, most of which were texts dating back hundreds of years. For example, two commonly used Arabic grammar textbooks were Jamaluddin ibn Hajib's *Al-Kafia fil Nahw* and Nuruddin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jami's *Fawa'id Ziyaya fi Sharh al-Kafia*, dating back to 1248 and 1492 respectively. Emphasis was placed on the prominent hadith collections (*Al-Muwatta*, for instance, or that of al-Bukhari or Abu Da'ud) as well as classical and medieval literature in Arabic, the study of which would help with the students' grasp of the language which would in turn allow them to continue grappling with the various texts that formed the bedrock of the rest of their syllabus.

The original institute prided itself on offering a modern education, itself drawing on the British educational model. It was highly popular and the syllabus and the methods of tuition spread throughout the region in the nineteenth century.

This shared educational experience — and a belief in the pedagogy — would later be adopted as the bedrock of the movement's educational policy when they attempted to run the government in the 1990s.

Sufism was part of their Deobandi heritage. Metcalf, 1982, outlines these roots in detail; some of the founders of the school in Deoband were Sufi *pirs*, the theology of *tasawwuf* was part of what was being taught and books like the *panj ketab* which are a mainstay of the education imparted in smaller madrassas across Afghanistan and Pakistan were replete with Sufi philosophy. Decades after the founding of the madrassa at Deoband, there was a backlash against this Sufi tendency and there was a pulling back on those kinds of ideas within the original Deobandi school, but in other places — i.e. the places where the Deobandi system and curriculum were exported to — Sufi practices that had been present in those areas continued as before.

(vii) Fruits of the *jihad*

It was not until the 1980s that *jihad* rose to a prominent stature in the madrassa syllabi in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and instruction up to that point had kept the term

143. Matinuddin, 2000; Ali, 2009, 184-186.

relatively theoretical. There is a rich and complex history to the term *jihad*, most of which is irrelevant to the purposes of this dissertation. The Arabic-language term *jihad* is derived from an Arabic root meaning 'to struggle,' 'to exert oneself,' or 'to strive.' As such, the word can mean different things depending on the context: sometimes a struggle against evil inclinations (the so-called 'greater jihad'),[144] or at other times a reference to legally-sanctioned (by the Islamic legal code) war. The term has been used in such a large variety of ways, over such a long period, that there are many different kinds. For the students in the years surrounding the 1980s war (also known as 'the *jihad*'), the particular kind was a defensive *jihad*, one directed to rid the country of 'invaders' (the forces of the Soviet Union, initially, but this definition came to include the Afghan forces whose minds had been 'polluted' by their ideology. By 1994, this definition of the enemy had coalesced around "corrupt tyrants" ruling over various parts of the country. During the 1980s, as later during the 1990s, Islam itself came to be seen as being under attack (in this, the *umma* or Islamic 'nation' was the thing that they needed to protect) and as such it was obligatory for Afghans to participate in the jihad. There are a number of different ways that one can contribute to a *jihad*; it does not have to be physical fighting.

See, as an example of the above, the interview with Mawlawi Enayatullah, published in *Tolo-ye Afghan* newspaper in May 1995 and also broadcast on the radio:

> *Question: In your opinion, what should the religious scholars and the Taliban and ordinary Afghans do under the present circumstances, where a part of the country is under sharia law while others parts of it are still ruled by corrupt tyrants?*
>
> *Answer: It is an obligation for all religious scholars and the Taliban and ordinary Afghans to do Jihad against the tyrants and try to stop their horror and injustice with all force, using all means at their disposal. This is not only the duty of the religious scholars and the Taliban. It is obligatory upon every ordinary Muslim living in this country. If they cannot physically participate in the Jihad against the corrupt rulers then should do so with their voice and their words, or at least disapprove it within their hearts.*[145]

144. The hadith on which the argument for the idea of the 'greater' and 'lesser' jihads rest is strongly disputed. See Alamri, 1990, 118-123 for details.

145. Enayatullah, 1995.

There had been numerous cases in earlier years when *jihad* was declared and villagers were mobilised; these instances had a cultural resonance in songs, poetry, and oral history. However, it was, even by the 1970s, a distant memory. It would take ten years of mobilisation during the 1980s (and the use of madrassas to stir students up for *jihad*) for this to become a much more potent force.

Across the border, there had been debates as to the role of *jihad* within the new Muslim state of Pakistan. Sayyed Abul A'ala Mawdudi, the founder of the *Jama'at al-Islami*, had issued a tract on the topic in 1927 which outlined his concept: justice as the core of a revolutionary movement to overthrow corrupt and oppressive governments.[146] There was, however, no active planning or scheming in Pakistan around the idea of Islam to bring about an 'Islamic revolution' or anything else at the time.

Zia ul-Haq's July 1977 coup meant the beginning of a period of Islamisation of Pakistani society. His preferred allies were the *Jama'at al-Islami*, although since they also didn't have an enveloping base of support, Zia ul-Haq also included other sectarian and religious organisations.[147] He stated in his first televised speech that, "Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of [an] Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country."[148]

Reforms made at the time included the rewriting of the educational syllabus in a way that emphasised Islam and the idea of *jihad*, together with the provision of equivalency certificates meaning that madrassa students' graduation certificates could now be accepted at non-Islamic institutions, leading to a much broader uptake in registrations at madrassas.[149]

For religious education and the Taliban, this meant a greater access and spread of madrassas in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The expansion by Pakistan also made

146. Bonney, 2004, 200-211.

147. "Collaboration with Zia ul-Haq's military regime strained some religious parties internally" (Haqqani, 2005, 137).

148. Quoted in Talbot, 1999, 251.

149. Ashraf, 2009, 25-26; Ali, 2009, 30-33; Hussain, 2005, chapter 3.

external support come in faster, and Saudi funding for the provision of religious education increased during this period.[150]

For the early 1970s, though, the distinction between religious study and involvement in political involvement still seemed to apply. As one Talib educated during that time remarked:

> *"During the Zahir Khan and Da'ud Khan times religion was separate from politics. The government couldn't interfere in religious issues and the religious people like Mullahs couldn't interfere in the government."*[151]

The religious students' attitude to religious authority was mostly one of respect. They held the knowledgeable and well-educated in great esteem and the Deobandi tradition was fundamentally conservative. This was not an education that taught students to find radical alternative solutions or ideas about religion and/or society. For the Deobandi madrassas in the tribal regions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, this was a scripture-centred and by-and-large literalist reading of Islam that allowed very little freedom of interpretation.[152]

(viii) Educating fighters

With the advent of Communism in Afghanistan and the 1979 Soviet invasion, secular schools — and their main centres found in the cities around the country — were quickly identified as being responsible for indoctrinating the Afghan youth, and for raising them to fight against their own.[153] Seeking to transform Afghanistan, the Soviet

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150. See comments made by Vali Nasr and Richard Holbrooke to PBS (Nasr, Unknown).

151. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

152. Note, however, that Zaman, 2002, argues that there has actually been considerable change and evolution of Deobandist scholarship and philosophy over the past century in response to outside change. Hanafism offered a measure of flexibility, too, that pushed back against the literalism that became a feature of many approaches to scripture from the 1970s onwards.

153. In a seminar held in Islamabad in May 1992, entitled "Means for compensating educational shortcomings in future Islamic society of Afghanistan," Prof. Fayel, the chairman, stated in his opening remarks that, "during the last 14 years the Kabul regime not only degraded the educational system in the country as a whole but by teaching the youth communist doctrine and recruiting them in the

Union and their Afghan allies in government had invested heavily in education.[154] They restructured the university and identified Qur'anic schools as places of opposition, themselves turning schools into a battleground.[155] Many in the rural hinterlands saw the new education programmes from the cities as being responsible for the growing fracture within society and the destruction that followed.[156] The Afghan mujahedeen came to regard schools as propaganda centres and legitimate targets as a result.[157] This analysis (and the resultant action) was supported by their foreign backers.[158]

After the Soviet forces had left, one of the major concerns of Afghan leaders, seminars and think-tanks during the early 1990s was the educational future of the country. Magazines and newspapers frequently ran long reports from seminars, book reviews relating to educational reform, and the summaries of syllabi that supported the need for an Islamic education.[159]

The Taliban — most of whose fighters and leaders had fought during the 1980s — had learnt a lesson about education that they would later employ when the administration of the country became their responsibility. Not only had their own educational experiences on the front lines given them the strength to get through the trials of *jihad* in the 1980s, but they would seek to inculcate a set of shared values among young people around the country through the education system, much as the Soviets had done.

KHAD and military units, gave them a thorough brainwash" (Afghan mujahedeen, 1992).

154. The Soviet Union invested heavily in the Afghan youth, with several thousand trained in schools in Moscow and beyond. See Rubin, 2002, 140-142 and Safi, 1988.

155. Teachers in particular, as records from Kandahar City show, were not only directly targeted but had also started to carry weapons. Stories and documents from the early 1980s illustrate how the educational reforms that the Communist regime implemented were perceived as a threat, and that the schools and teachers were seen as legitimate targets and enemies of Afghanistan.

156. Educational reforms were one of the main causes of rebellion in 1978-9.

157. Safi, 1988, 113.

158. Coll, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2662.

159. Much of the discussion, however, appears to not only recognise the destruction and misuse of the educational system during the jihad, but also the rather poor state of education before it. Some commentators have pointed out that it was the lack of a solid educational system that allowed for the infiltration of Communist thought among the young Afghan population.

The leadership came to see education as being a key factor that kept the flame of jihad burning. The opening of a 'jihadi library' in September 1997 is, for example, the occasion for discussion in newspapers about how "imperialists" were not content with military victory, and that they made efforts "to take away the scholarly, cultural and academic legacy and writings of jihad as these are considered to be important sources and factors of inspiration and motivation of the future generation."[160] In this way, education is the link to preserve the cultural heritage, which allows the individuals to withstand seeming inevitable attack from outsiders.

> *"The inauguration of the jihadist library practically demonstrates the great achievements and behaviour of the Taliban Islamic Movement since its beginning till the present [and] that they are true mujahedeen and jihad supporters. They have picked up weapons for this very objective and will make efforts for the sanctity and truthfulness of jihad till the very end. If God so wills."*[161]

(ix) Justifications for *jihad*

We can make a distinction between the education being taught in government-run / secular schools at the time, and the more specialised religious schools. For the talibs, the detailed legal justifications for *jihad* were explained, as were the various typologies (the distinction between an offensive and defensive jihad, for instance). This would not have been part of the education being imparted at the secular schools. These kind of distinctions were an important reason some students left government schools and transitioned into the religious education and syllabus, also coupled with the fear that Communist ideology was being forced on children.[162]

For the most part, however, *jihad* seems to have functioned more like a slogan and/or a rallying call rather than the focal point for a debate about the laws of war.

Children were taught poems and short songs exhorting students to "sacrifice" and to stand up to fight against enemies. This was happening from as early as the 1970s and

160. Editorial team, 1997e; Editorial team, 1997f.

161. Editorial team, 1997f.

162. Mullah Zaeef's biography offers one such example (Zaeef, 2010).

the Communist authorities had their own versions of textbooks to make their own exhortations.[163] In this way, *jihad* was an emotional tag that could be attached to all sorts of issues and was eventually used to mobilise youth to fight inside Afghanistan during the 1980s.

The practical applications of this were more clearly acted upon than any theoretical discussion. *Jihad* was something that everyone in the 1980s could eventually go and do, and they would be confronted with real issues upon which they received some instruction. Questions that are part of the instruction included the right way to treat prisoners of war, which tactics were permitted, which interactions with the enemy were permitted, the ways of interacting with other groups fighting in the same area, as well as a whole panoply of procedural issues such as how to keep up with obligations like the daily prayers. In general, there was considerable concern, during the 1980s (as later, post-1994), about making the fight morally just. If errors were made, this would invalidate what they were doing, and it could also potentially invalidate the martyrdom of others who had gone before them. The senior leadership, particularly Mullah Mohammad Omar, as we shall discuss later, were very concerned with doing things in the 'right way'.

Non-military tactics were also key to the education being imparted. If there was a way to conduct themselves without fighting, then they saw some honour in taking it. Many of their territorial gains from 1994-6 happened exactly in this way. At the beginning this was mainly because they lacked the requisite numbers to dominate purely through force, but by and large they developed a way of sending interlocutors to speak with local communities, negotiating access and safe passage and eventually making semi-formal agreements for the handover of control of these territories.[164] They also used this as a way of publicly distinguishing themselves from their opponents in their media outreach. Mullah Mohammad Abbas, Minister for Public Health, stated in 1996, for example, that "the Taliban chose the way of dialogue to solve the problems

163. Davis, 2002.

164. Davis, 2001, 50-55.

but Sayyaf, Masoud and Hekmatyar chose the path of violence and forced the movement to resort to fighting."[165]

For the lower-ranking fighters, therefore, *jihad* functioned much more as a rallying call than an intellectual argument. For those higher up, they were required to study the various justifications and counterarguments and for this reason, it seems, it was something that was raised fairly often during the 1990s in justifications for actions that the movement was taking. Specifically, the moral validity and correctness of their fight was seen as important because if those who were dying weren't *shaheed* or martyr, then this would devalue and invalidate the entire point of their fight. Also, if the conflict was no *jihad*, then what they were going was morally flawed and they were not behaving properly. In many ways, one of the key points of the movement was that they viewed themselves as being on a higher moral ground than the other groups, so being on solid basis vis-a-vis their moral precepts was important to them.

This connected to the so-called "fruits" of the *jihad*. These were numerous, but justice, peace and the opportunity to live in the right way were equally important, even if only as an outer-facing self-conception projected towards others.

(x) Moral vision

Jihad connects to everything else in their approach through the idea of justice. The Taliban movement did not seek to establish Islam throughout the country for Islam's sake only, but because they genuinely believed it was the most just system. This is embedded in every claim and place where individuals state that it was(/is) necessary to implement "an Islamic system." This is an assumption that many make in that they find it hard that someone would not consider the "Islamic system" the most just, fair and morally good system available. They held this belief not only as a logical precept but also on account of Islam being the 'final' revelation (i.e. having occurred subsequent to that of the other Abrahamic religious traditions).

165. Abbas Akhund, 1996.

There were, therefore, some higher-order parts to what individuals learnt about *jihad* during the 1980s: the importance of duty (and its cousin, service); the importance of sacrifice; the importance of humility; and the general entreaty to the moral life. All this was encompassed in the phrase *fi sabil allah*.[166]

These values gave those who fought during the 1980s and 1990s an increased confidence in their own experiences and practices.[167] This was reinforced by their involvement with the courts, and the social reinforcement when communities (often, though not always) appreciated their involvement in the mediation of local conflicts, judging of criminals and so on. This feeling of confidence would become harder to find (and accordingly, it was more sought after) as their rule solidified over the country towards the end of the 1990s and early 2000s.[168]

A report published in *Tolo-ye Afghan* newspaper on a series of meetings that took place in July-August 1995 offers a useful overview of some of these ideas.[169] Religious scholars from around the country were meeting in Kandahar and the article recounts various speeches given during the gatherings. For instance, Mawlawi Ahmadullah, from Kabul, spoke of the "three golden principles of Islam which were important for the establishment of an Islamic system in the country":

> *the first system was that of 'qisas'. He said according to this principle anyone who commits murder should be executed. He said his principle was a guarantee to the lives of the people in a society and was important because it would stop anyone form committing murder. He said if this principle is properly implemented in the society then no murders will take place. Another golden principle was that of 'zina'. According to this principle the dignity of human beings will be protected in the society. Anyone who commits adultery should be punished according to the principles of Islam and then as a result no one will commit such a crime again. The third golden principle was that of '[ji]had' and it meant that Muslims should struggle and fight for their freedom and protection of their faith. Jihad of an obligation of all Muslims, in the light of this golden principle of Islam. He said the Muslim nation should rise as one and stand united against any aggression which undermines their identity and their faith. He said the people of*

166. From the Arabic; literally"on the path/way of God".

167. See chapter four for more on how the 1980s war was essential to shaping the experiences and attitudes of taliban fighters.

168. It is worth mentioning that the dissolution of the early 1990s — a state which most of the religious students and clerics did not contribute to creating — was at the forefront of how they sought to behave post-1994. In other words, they modelled themselves in opposition to the way religious and social values had fallen apart.

169. Editorial team, 1995j.

Afghanistan should fight against anyone who prevents the establishment of an Islamic system in the country. He said it was our duty to work and strive towards our aim, which is the implementation of the Islamic principles in the society. He said the people of Afghanistan should not refrain from making any necessary sacrifice for the sake of their faith. They should stand with the Islamic movement and work for a prosperous future.[170]

A scholar from Logar, Mawlawi Mohammad Yusuf, spoke about the reasons for establishing an Islamic system:

The aim of the Islamic movement of the Taliban is to establish a purely Islamic system in this country. This movement wants to implement the principles of the Koran because that is the only way towards success and peace and stability in this country.[171]

Mawlawi Mohammad Akram, from Nangarhar province, spoke about the benefits of following such a system:

"He said Islam guaranteed justice and equality. He said according to Islamic principles anyone who commits a sin should be punished and justice should be provided to the victim immediately. He said any delay in providing justice is against the teachings of Islam. He said any land where the true principles of Islam are implemented is guaranteed to enjoy peace and stability."[172]

Mawlawi Shams ur-Rahman, from Wardak province, compared the Islamic system with other forms of government around the world:

"He said most of these countries confused pure Islamic laws and principles with a number of other laws which were influenced by western and non-Islamic ideologies. As a result the governments in these countries did not deliver justice and badly failed to serve their people."[173]

170. Editorial team, 1995j.

171. Editorial team, 1995j.

172. Editorial team, 1995j.

173. Editorial team, 1995j.

This moral vision and sense of certainty was at the forefront of their self-conception as well as how they chose to present the movement to others. This blend of emotion, conflict and increasing influence was a strong brew and offered a powerful motivation for them. Chapter four will explore the practical implications of the upturning of social customs and hierarchies, but for now it should suffice to note that these fighters were taking action to change their circumstances and that of those around them.

It is hard to understate the impact of this on their motivation and sense of agency. In this way, the somewhat theoretical concepts that had been part of their education were blended with a compelling and series of actionable steps. Senior leadership figures were quick to see how this could be harnessed in bringing in new recruits. The religious factor was important in providing fertile soil — a kind of ideological compost — in which the movement could flourish, but broader cultural and circumstantial factors then became important to blend the emotional with the ideological.

3. *Taranay* and *Afghaniyat*

"Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic form, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture."

Clifford Geertz[174]

"Through their social practice of itinerancy and support from grassroots alms, it seems that [they] were able to write poetry of extreme impropriety, focusing on the primacy of passion as morality. More than that, taliban poets were able to actively lampoon specific local elites from a position of self-deprecating non-dominance, and were often known as wicked satirists."

James Caron[175]

"Sayyed! Even if I am destined to live in far away cities,

I will remain the rough Pashtun of the mountains."

Ghazal, Sayyed, December 4, 2007[176]

Religious identity is a core aspect of who the Taliban are, but their cultural identity is arguably more useful as a distinguishing feature.[177] Not only is there a clear and distinctive product — the *tarana* and associated forms of verse/song — but it is something that is more recognisably theirs, more so than a particular religious position which is shared by many others; play the audio of one of the songs and this brings you into a particular cultural tradition.

Cultural identity, as defined for this Ph.D., is partly an aesthetic category, and as such I will explore the symbolic universe as constructed through the pre-1980s poetry. I also follow Patrick Porter by conceiving of culture "not just as a system of meanings, but as a dialectical relationship between system and practice. This 'performative' approach recognises that culture is not so much 'logical, coherent, shared, uniform, and static'

174. Quoted in Ahmed, 1984, 310.

175. Caron, 2011, 184.

176. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b, 116.

177. Geertz has even discussed religion as a cultural system in an essay which explores the intersections between the religious sphere of Islam and the tribal aspects of being a Pashtun (Geertz, 1966).

but is 'a sphere of practical activity shot through by wilful action, power relations, struggle, contradiction, and change."[178]

Of particular interest is the Taliban's sense of morality as imagined through this aesthetic universe. Other aspects can also be brought into consideration, including even their sense of personal style and fashion. Emotional identity is also an important part of this cultural sense, although it is less of a unique distinguishing factor than the *tarana*.

This chapter looks at the context of the Taliban's cultural identity and their output in *taranay*.[179] What kinds of themes did they explore in their songs? How did it compare to other Afghan poetic output of the period? To what extent were the Taliban members' contributions unique? What kind of moral universe was described in the *taranay*? Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of how the definition of this cultural identity intersects with their ethnic identity — to what extent was the Taliban's cultural expression a Pashtun product?

The first section offers an overview of their cultural products, detailing what the poems and songs express regarding a shared identity. This is all set in the context of the genre, form and period. This is followed by a discussion of some elements of the Taliban's cultural policy as expressed and enacted publicly. Some of these will be discussed in more detail in chapters five and six. The chapter ends with a brief overview of some relevant context to the Taliban's ethnic identity, looking at the extent to which we can call the Taliban a 'Pashtun' movement. This will, too, be explored in subsequent chapters.

(a) Taliban cultural identity

Culture was extremely important to the Taliban. From the songs played on the government's radio station to the poems published in their newspapers, this outpouring of verse should be considered a serious expression of their identity. The

178. Porter, 2009, 14.

179. *Taranay* is the Pashto plural form of *tarana*.

Taliban of the 1990s had a 'way' or set of mannerisms that was instantly recognisable to anyone who encountered them. It is a truism to state that they were products of their environment, but this should not detract from an exploration of the ways their religious and social upbringing shaped how they saw themselves and how they behaved when they were in power. Indeed, they sometimes used their cultural heritage as a crutch in times of crisis or when a clear solution was not evident.

The cultural output associated with the Taliban and explored in this chapter was effective in generating a shared emotion-bound solidarity within the country, one that has proven remarkably resilient even into the post-2001 period, where the same tropes, forms and styles have retained their power with younger generations. This blend of Islam and local culture — southern Pashtun culture, for the most part, given the provenance of those who led and made up the core of the movement — was the perfect expression of the ideal types to which they aspired, and, as such, an excellent place to start when attempting to describe their identity.

These poems are part of a long tradition of Pashtun poetry (although the equally rich Farsi/Dari and Arabic traditions have played their role) stretching back hundreds of years. These older poems mostly could not be characterised as being 'Taliban poetry' themselves — in this way, it is a newer form among this tradition — but the genres, metres, themes, metaphors and emotional appeals used are often similar or the same. In the words of one Talib interviewee:

> *"Back then, when Rahman Baba was writing, it was all about love and philosophy. Different times emerged: it became about war and blood. The tarana are not really like the poems from Rahman Baba, but he set the scene."*[180]

It is in this way that we can talk of the Taliban's cultural heritage, one that has a great deal in common with a Pashtun cultural heritage.[181]

180. Interview, Kandahar, November 2009.

181. See, for example, the op-ed published by Abdur Rahman Hakeemzada entitled, "The value and status of the turban from the point of view of shari'a" (Hakeemzada, 2000).

In the same way that we can say that the Taliban are a movement with many Pashtuns but not a 'Pashtun movement', for the poetry we can say it is a tradition with much input from Pashtun cultural traditions but would stop short of calling it a 'Pashtun cultural tradition.'

(b) Historical precedent

Talk to any Afghan for any length of time and you'll find he or she uses a quote or a phrase from a poem at some point during the conversation. Poetry is part of the lifeblood of discussion, both in the discussions among politicians on live television chat shows in the evenings in Kabul as well as among villagers out in some far-flung province.

Poetry in Afghanistan has a long and rich history. This is as true for Farsi/Dari as it is for Pashto. Rumi is often associated with Turkey in Europe and the United States, but in Afghanistan he is known as either Mawlana or just Balkhi ('from Balkh'). A succession of rulers sponsored and supported poets like Ferdowsi (who wrote the Shahname). In Herat, the Timurids oversaw a cultural renaissance that extended past poetry to tile work, pottery, architecture, painting and others.

The name of the first Pashto poet is unknown, but the first Pashto poetry that we can identify with some certainty is by Bayazid. There were almost certainly poets writing before him, but the two legends of the Pashto poetry tradition are Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689) and Rahman Baba (1650-1715). They are still very much quoted, read and recited by Afghans. They were prolific, and the scale of subject matter covered defies summary.

Poetry is used in all spheres of life: on political occasions, for social change, for religious purposes, at home, for weddings, for funerals, for festivals and even — as we shall see — on the battlefield. Talk to any fighter from the 1980s war and they will tell you stories of poetry and song. In contemporary Afghanistan, Ahmed Wali Karzai, the brother of the former President, occasionally hosted sessions of music and poetry in

Kandahar in which the poets — just as they might have done at court in the Elizabethan age in England — offered their praises for their host.

Afghanistan is known for its contributions to Farsi literature going back centuries. Some features of the tradition have carried through to this collection. Poets often name themselves in the penultimate line of the poem[182] in an invocation. The forms and rhyme schemes used are often the same ones that have been used for hundreds of years: the ghazal, *landay* and *sandara* (and so on) are all formats with their own rules.[183] Certain tropes have become standard: the image of the moth drawn to the flame, eventually consumed and burnt up; that of women washing their clothes in the river, or collecting water at the well; the allure of eyelashes or the bangles jingling on their wrists, and so on. These are all employed by the Taliban in their poems.

Poetry written by religious students — talibs with a small 't' — is a tradition that extends as far back as there were religious students:

> *"Taliban (like some other groups such as herbalists or itinerant entertainer castes) were a special and different case. As Ajmal Khattak's memoirs describe it, local landed elites were frequently unable to co-opt or block critical poetry when performed by trans-local taliban. If local maliks refused to allow talib parties a public forum on the taliban's own terms, they could rest assured that their stinginess would become talib lore, defaming their lack of beneficent manhood throughout the countryside.*
>
> *"This personalized attack on specific powerful people, rather than 'powerful people' as an abstract category, would not be the case with the more ordinary sort of village poets tied to landed power. For them, social criticism seems to have been oblique and metaphorical, taking lyrical form. Of course, the two types of poets did listen to each other, and could not be stopped from informing each other's work. Important as that point is, it is also important to note another thing. Taliban had institutional links to a horizontal, even if highly marginal, network outside the geographical purview of local power; and those links protected them from the control of 'mere' locality. Both Mlatar and Khattak describe their freedom with a great deal of romanticism, at the same time they describe their abject poverty."*[184]

182. This is, technically, the final line in the Pashto presentation of the poem; in translation the lines are split up into two for the most part.

183. MacKenzie, 1958.

184. Caron, 2011, 185.

Nowadays, poetry and an aesthetic consciousness are everywhere in daily life in Afghanistan. It is perhaps fading into disuse — some sections of the younger generation are less aware of their poetic heritage — but nonetheless still to be found.

There are all sorts of proverbs and sayings that are used on a frequent basis in conversation. It's sometimes used to prove a point, or to spice up or lighten the moment during a long speech. The president uses proverbs as does the baker down the road. Well-known poems are often excerpted and used liberally in general conversation or in an argument. In Kandahar, there is even a tradition of incredibly sexually explicit sayings that seems to know no bounds.

Folk songs are also part of the tradition. They can be found all over the country, but there is a particular precedent for it in the southern provinces. The pitch of the voice is high — just as in the Taliban's tarana. The form seems adapted to Pashto rhythms and poems.

Even while there seems to be a precedent in the south, there are just as many folk songs and ballads in Dari as there are in Pashto. A village might only have one man who knows the old songs (or a women, among women), but as such they are considered repositories of sorts.[185]

Indeed, in southern Afghanistan it seems poems are sung at the extremes — very late or very early in the day, when death calls, or for celebrations; above all, amidst suffering.

There are dozens of stories which were first told in verse but whose narrative has been transferred into general wisdom. There is the tragic love story of Laila and Majnun. It was first popularised in a poem by Nizami but is now a common cultural reference. There are several other variants of this. The classical poetry of several centuries past is frequently assigned as part of the syllabus studied in madrassas.

Remember, too, that there is also a precedent for this kind of recitation in the Qur'an. Islam's core source is told in a *saj'* rhymed prose and is intended to be recited. Recitation is a part of daily life in that, five times a day, the *azan* is called to invite the

185. Michael Semple, when asking a Talib about a recent military operation in southern Afghanistan, was given an MP3 track of a tarana; this was seen as all he needed to know (Semple, 2011a, 1).

faithful to prayer. This increases during the month of Ramadan during *tarawih* gatherings during which a complete recitation of the Qur'an is made over the days of the fasting month. Qur'anic recitation often happens at births, and always for funerals at the *fateha* ceremonies.

The madrassas in Afghanistan and Pakistan both use a syllabus (the so-called *dars-e nizami* that includes the *Panj Ketab* (which means 'five books' in Farsi/Dari). These books include a translated version of the classical Arabic collection of stories *Kalila wa Dimna*. All of these are mainstays of the literary output of the region. Madrassa students would be expected to read these books and memorise parts of them.

Each year there are poetry festivals around the country. Two of the most famous are held in Nangarhar and Kandahar: Narenj Gul and Anaar Gul respectively, named after the orange blossom and the pomegranate blossom that flowers in spring.

Some poets are even so well-known and beloved among Afghans that they are treated like celebrities. Abdul Bari Jahani, for example, was treated as such when he travelled round greater Kandahar in the early winter of 2011-12.

These old generation poets are respected both for their age as well as their wisdom. Poetry is part of the cultural heritage for the younger generation, one that cannot be destroyed as the Buddhas in Bamiyan were, and one in which idealism and strong convictions burn strong.

(c) *Tarana*

(i) Source provenance and authorship

Sources for this chapter are poems collected by a researcher in southern Afghanistan (Kandahar and Zabul) as well as in Kabul. Poems were all dated to the pre-2001 period. These were transcribed from old cassette recordings, from the notebooks of Taliban-era officials, judges and poets in Kandahar, Kabul and Zabul and from old newspapers.[186]

186. Some of these poems were published in newspapers as part of the regular media output of the

In contrast to those published in the post-2001 period on the Taliban's official website, the poems used for this research can almost always be tied back to specific authors who are using their real names.

In any case, it is uncommon for the authors of the *tarana* to become famous on the basis of their work; rather, those who recite the audio versions gain some measure of celebrity for the quality of their voice. This is also in part a corollary of the oral culture that exists in large parts of Afghanistan, one of the reasons authors would embed their name or *takhallus* into the poem itself — this way it would not be forgotten or lost even if the packaging or 'metadata' (the date, or the author's name) itself was.

These were widely-consumed cultural products, available and regularly featured on the radio as well as in newspapers and magazines for the literate. The yearly poetry festivals and competitions also tended to feature this specific form of song. In March 1997, an entire issue of Shariat newspaper was devoted to commentary and coverage of a conference in Kabul "on the occasion of spring's arrival and following the ensuring of security in the country." The newspaper's head, Mawlawi Abd al-Rahman Hotaki, gave a speech in which he stated that:

> *"when Taliban put their books in madrassas and pens in their pockets to ensure Islamic system, territorial integrity, political and national sovereignty of their homeland, they not only kept the trenches of jihad heated with the bloods and sacrifices, but also rolled up their sleeves for the cultural construction of the country. In a very short time, they have provided a lot of services in this regard."*[187]

The older poems offer a precedent, however, that was taken up by the current generation. Not only are the themes covered in the verses collected for the purpose of this chapter varied and often surprising, but their styles play on the older precedent offered by Rahman Baba and others of the original poetic tradition.

Taliban's news outlets pre-2001.

187. Editorial team, 1997b.

(ii) Sound

The sound and presentation of the poems as songs is an important part of how they were intended to be consumed. Although the texts were found in notebooks, printed in newspapers and so on, it is above all an oral form, one that found its apotheosis on the national radio station, where sometimes hours would pass with only these songs being intoned.

The songs, when sung, are always monophonic, unison melodies. The singer is always a man (or a boy), never a woman. The words 'hypnotic' or 'trance-like' are often employed by non-Afghans to describe these audio versions, but Afghans seldom use these words themselves.

The melody lies at the upper edges of the range of what performers are comfortable with singing. This gives a more intense and heightened quality to the melody. The use of reverb effects added in post-production often add an echo. As such, the musical quality of the songs themselves is unique and recognisable almost immediately upon hearing a few seconds of an audio track. The modern equivalents of these include sound effects 'from the battlefield', but this seems to be more common among the Pakistani Taliban than for the Afghans. The *tarana* are frequently used as the soundtrack to propaganda videos showing attacks on American or Afghan forces that are mostly produced and distributed out of Pakistan.

The *tarana* released by the Taliban in Dari sound quite different from those in Pashto, in part because the music and rhythm inherent in the sounds of the language are quite different. Even without understanding a word of either Dari or Pashtu, distinguishing the two is quite easy. Only four of the poems gathered for this chapter were written in Dari, and they don't seem to have been well-known. This was predominantly a Pashto-language form.

(iii) Style

The songs use traditional Pashto poetry forms for the most part. Almost all of them are written in a traditional style; there is very little that could be described as 'free verse'. The rhyme and rhythm are also traditional for the most part. This is something that any Pashtun man would have been exposed to at some point while growing up. These poems and the forms they inhabit are also the same forms used in the 1980s, operating with the same conventions. The *ghazal*, for example, has a repeated end-rhyme which recurs at the end of every line, but not at the half-line or *beit*. Note, too, that while these *tarana* are now consumed in the cities, they remain a product of the rural or village culture out of which the Taliban movement emerged.

(iv) Thematic overview

These poems covered a seemingly wide range of themes, although they often focused on the effects of war inside Afghanistan or on inspiring rank-and-file soldiers to continue their *jihad*. This ranged from long elegies with reportage-like focus on the details of a single village, to pastoral scenes and reflections on the beauty of a rose, to religious meditations.

For the most part, the poems are often couched in very personal terms — talking about all the things that you might expect poets to cover — and where there are political messages, these are often not as overt as you might expect. There are love poems, religious poems, and nationalist poems; lots, however, focuses on suffering brought about by conflict, on how the poet would fight back, and on why they are fighting. Additionally, there is considerable mention of the experiences of rural villagers.

Grima has outlined her sense of how Pashto verse can be split into two very broad modes: 'authentic' poems (such as those written by Rahman Baba) in which love and loss are extolled alongside a sense of helplessness and *gham* or sorrow; this is contrasted by the 'heroic' poems (exemplified by Khoshhaal Khan Khattak) in which

honour and pride are the dominant themes.[188] Grima argues that the 'authentic' mode is the default position of the Pashto poetic tradition, but that the stylistic pendulum has swung towards the 'heroic' at certain points in history. Most recently, she identifies the 1980s *jihad* as a time when the 'heroic' came back into fashion among poets. This is certainly reflected in the primary sources collected for this dissertation.

The poems are, for the most part, relatively straightforward in their meaning. Some of the imagery is only intelligible to someone with prior exposure to Pashtun poetry, but almost all of it is understandable by any audience (even a non-Afghan audience). There is some symbolism, but the poets draw from a relatively standardised collection of imagery, and in any case the situations described make figuring out the meaning somewhat easier.

There are a variety of synonyms used to denote those affiliated with or fighting for 'the Taliban'. One of the most common is the word 'mujahed', or 'person who does jihad'; 'ghazi' is another term frequently used.[189] Sometimes the poet will try to address a broader audience so he/she will reference words designed to appeal to fellow Muslims ('brother', 'umma' and so on).

Two poems that refer to foreigners offer strikingly opposite attitudes. 'Blood Debt' is strident, and amidst a catalogue of international involvement in Afghanistan states:

"The Pharaoh of the time sends arrows everywhere,
These arrows will finally strike Washington's chest."[190]

The other, 'Message to the Internationals', offers an appeal to the foreigners:

"Now we look at you with hopeful eyes,
We are begging before you.

188. Grima, 2005, 143-160.

189. "Ghazi" literally translates from the Arabic (but is used throughout the Muslim world) as "Islamic warrior" and is a loosely approximate alternative for the term "mujahed", albeit one with different cultural and historic connotations.

190. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b, 76.

Why did you become like Pharaoh?
Why are you concealing your nose?

Why don't any emotions come to your heart?
This is essential for human beings.
O enemy of ancient humanity,
This is one of your moral duties."[191]

A core of the poems relate to the identity of those involved in the 'movement' (*harakat*), however, and an examination of these shows how they blend religious themes together with more abstract and/or aesthetic themes.

(1) Values

Two poems best exemplify the oppositions and values expressed by this first set of verse. The first, by Mirwais Bawari dating to 1995 offers these up in a straightforward fashion.

Enough of the talk of [political] parties,
Let us put an end to linguistic discrimination.
[…]
Enough of the talk of meetings,
Let us relieve people from the oppression of the cruel.
Enough of the talk of cruelty,
Come, let us bring peace and security.
Enough of the talk of war,
Let us rebuild our country again.
Enough of the talk of tribes,
Come, let us light the lamp of the Qur'an.
Enough of the talk of darkness,

191. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b, 77.

That Omar has the right courage in him.[192]

The second, broadcast on the radio on September 26, 1996 and written by Raziq, is also a list of sorts, but slightly wider ranging regarding the aspirations that he assigns to the movement.

For the sake of freedom I sacrifice; I am the Talib of freedom
The Talib of peace and tranquillity in the homeland
A thunder against warlords and highwaymen
The Talib of my people's reconciliation and prosperity
My struggle is to vanquish the vicious myths
I am the Talib of austerity and sacrifice for the path of righteousness
We will bring the light of life to our darkened country
I am the Talib who reconstructs our ruined homeland
I will give sacred water to this thirsty country
On the path of Islam, I will bring progress to the nation
I will vanquish all occupiers and traitors
In the name of God I'm the Talib of justice and equality
I will eradicate cruelty and corruption
I am for happiness and the prosperity of every Afghan
Instead of fire and blood, I will bring love and brotherhood
I am against vices, I am the Talib of merits and virtues[193]

Above all, the poems build up an opposition between "the shari'a and the Qur'an" and a long list of things that will happen when Islam is not present. This list includes corruption, crisis, tyranny, injustice, disunity, lawlessness, discrimination, prejudice, terror, ignorance[194] and, more concretely, "the tears of widows and orphans". Islam is seen as the tool by which these manifestations will be removed.

192. Bawari, 1995.

193. Raziq, 1996.

194. from *The Message of the Talib*: "I will wipe ignorance out // I will raise the flag of Islam" (Unknown, 1995c).

"No longer are cries heard in the orphan's house;
Again the flag of Islam is flying everywhere.
Every Afghan and the oppressed are happy underneath [the flag];
I hear the oppressors are being ruined everywhere."[195]

The positive characteristics of this Islamic environment include references to purity (also associated, light and clarity), honesty, 'truth', patriotism (sometimes inserted alongside the Qur'an), peace and security, and happiness.

Unity is a very important quality that is often stressed, as Bawari also mentioned above. Authors did not want or support the idea of political parties or a political free-for-all. The experience of the 1980s and early 1990s had taught the young religious scholars and their affiliates that political pluralism — and, by extension, organisational pluralism in which a plethora of military groups was able to spread and become strong — was not something that they could condone or encourage, even if later on a more politically mature society could slowly reintroduce some of these things. As the former Taliban Information Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, puts it, "there is nothing in disunity but bringing oneself down."[196]

'The law' is used as a synonym for the Qur'an, something that is imbued with qualities of impartiality and lacking any prejudice: "It has no prejudice against black or against white".[197] This 'right path' (also a reference/quote from the Qur'an and hadith literature) is contrasted with the 'wrong path', and many poets note that the Qur'an is the ideal guide to travelling down this 'right path'. *Al-Siraat ul-Mustaqiim*, of course, is synonymous with the shari'a and what it promises for the hereafter.[198]

Additionally, the Qur'an is presented as being the path towards knowledge and civilisation in some verses, although in the sample collected for this research this was a relatively uncommon sentiment:

195. Mazlum, Unknown.
196. Muttaqi, Unknown.
197. Raziq, 1997.
198. Note, for example, the title of this well-known introduction to Islam: Esposito, 2011.

"I am the cradle of knowledge and civilisation
I spread wisdom around the world"[199]

A second set of oppositions is focused around the idea of "honour and dignity" rather than "shame". These are core parts of Pashtun cultural and ethnic identity, and might be said to be the core of how this aspiration is expressed. Everything is done to preserve one's *nang* or honour, and to prevent *sharm* or shame.

In the poems written by and for Talibs during the 1990s, courage and faith are presented as pathways to gain that honour. In particular, the defeat of the British in the Anglo-Afghan wars and the defeat of the Soviets during the 1980s are both seen as examples of that struggle to retain honour. Shame is seen as being the result of cowardice, a lack of values, and of not following through on one's values when you recognise them.

Honour is frequently paired with 'prestige' or references to the fame of the Taliban throughout the world. Note, therefore, that how they were seen by outsiders was a crucial part of their vision and self-conception. This is part of what makes the honour honourable. Without an audience, the honour is almost seen as having less value. This is a social concept, one that is enacted in and amongst the people of one's country and among other nations. Mentions of "the pages of history" are made fairly often as well as lines like "the name of our nation will be mentioned with pride".[200] While the Taliban's values were often abstract appeals to virtue and goodness, they also were meant to be seen and to be observed. This has important implications for how their policy was formed as will be explored in chapter six.

One poem written by Ali Jan even grants a place for women in this struggle to retain one's honour and freedom:

"A religious scholar, a Talib, can never be a slave

199. Haqyar, 1990.
200. Ajez, Unknown.

Many may try it, I know they will fail

Today, along with the youth of this country
I can see our women also coming out to the battlefield"[201]

It is important to note, though, that this is a rare mention of an active female role in the fight to uphold one's values. There are several mentions of a passive role, which is to say a man upholding his values by protecting a woman.

One poem ("The Martyrs Are Here") written by a woman, Hanifa Zahed, published in Tolo-ye Afghan in October 1997 describes the victims of the 1980s war, but states specifically that it will be the "righteous youth" ("those Afghans over whose bodies wheels were run") who will take revenge. It is a strikingly passive poem, with the author detached from the events going on around her.[202]

A third set of oppositions is built around that of effort versus indolence. This is expressed in lines like "Struggle instead of leisure" or, in Muttaqi's words, "hate the warm bed and bring revolution instead."[203] Built into this assumption that zeal is an important part of the Taliban's identity is the idea of duty: a good Muslim or Talib is expected to think of duty instead of what comes to one's mind independently. Indeed, 'idle thoughts' are often chastised in the pages of one of the newspapers running during the Taliban's rule, *Tolo-ye Afghan*. A selfless attitude is also said to be the right way to go about carrying out your duty, to "work for others" instead of engaging in self-interest. One of the best ways to accomplish all this is 'heroism', but we will return to that in our examination of the martial poems.

As a value for the movement, freedom is preferred to slavery. Self-determination — independence from foreigners and/or oppression — is seen as one of the key steps to freedom, though as might be expected from verse, not all the resultant questions as to the political implications are not spelled out. Impartiality — similar to that mentioned

201. Jan, Unknown.
202. Zahed, 1997.
203. Muttaqi, Unknown.

in the same breath as the Qur'anic invocations earlier — is stressed as well, even in very specific regional political terms:

"No one has influenced us to stand up
We do not have ties to any group"[204]

This could be a reference to Pakistan or the United States. From 1994-1996, many rumours reportedly circulated that the Taliban were backed by the United States, since they were seen as one of the global powers most likely to offer support.[205]

An important value for the movement is that of "brotherhood".[206] In the poem listed above, Raziq is describing the ideal Talib, positing the various qualities as a series of oppositions. Brotherhood is the penultimate pair mentioned, only losing out to 'being against vice':

"Instead of fire and blood, I will bring love and brotherhood
I'm against vices, I am the Talib of merits and virtues"[207]

And in June 1995, another poet is describing the movement before it has taken Kabul. Brotherhood here is seen as a value that trumps tribe, ethnicity, sect and various other ways of fragmenting Afghan society:

"The Islamic movement of the Taliban wants to bring all these tribes and all these ethnicities together under one single flag and under one single banner
It wants to encourage and develop the spirit of unity and the spirit of brotherhood among the different tribes and ethnicities in this country"[208]

204. Bahauddin, Unknown.

205. Interviews, Afghanistan, 2008-2011.

206. "Wherever the Taliban forces have gone they have created an atmosphere of brotherhood and put an end to personal and individual tensions among the people of those areas." (Editorial team, 1995d).

207. Raziq, 1996.

208. Mohammadyar, 1995.

It is, of course, derived in part from their Islamic heritage, but as a value it was mentioned both in songs and in more formal press releases. This article on the opening of Kandahar airport in 1995 gives a sense of the kind of esteem given to the idea:

> *"This movement's first step was on the international airport of Kandahar. On that first day, one of the Taliban responsible for the airport gathered together all personal and workers of the airport and through Islamic brotherhood lightened their troubled countenances and blossomed the buds of hopes in their hearts."*[209]

Finally, these poems express a desire for rebuilding rather than destruction. (Also, 'moving forward' rather than going backward). There were a small number of poems taking this logic in a different direction and arguing for "revolution", but these were not common. Intriguingly, some of these were written by Amir Khan Muttaqi who later went on to become the Taliban's Information Minister, but there is no indication as to the context of these poems.

Poems varied from the abstract to the specific. The values hoped for in these poems are relatively concrete, however, and despite their seemingly unattainable idealism, these showcase a blend of Islamic aspiration and their Pashtun heritage, a mix perhaps best expressed in a few lines by Abdul Hamid Arghandabi and published on July 27, 1998:

> *"This nation bows out of respect for you*
> *They have filled the empty stronghold out of respect for you, Talib*
> *We shall free you from the bars of the prison*
> *We shall make the desert and valleys red with their blood, Talib*
> *Our freedom will be the way to bring you the glory of Islam*
> *We shall scatter flower upon you as the good news of our victory, Talib*
> *Since we have suckled the milk from a Pashtun woman*

209. Editorial team, 1995e.

We shall break your shackles with our strong belief, Talib"[210]

This was the fuel that the leaders hoped would encourage participation and support.

(2) Martial

The poems of war, where the clamour of battle intersects with the zealous imposition of these very values, are by no means the most common kind found in the collection gathered for this research. They only make up approximately a quarter of the total number, but nevertheless they are an important part of who the Taliban are. The movement was forged in the fires of the 1980s *jihad* and in the early battles to take territory between 1994-1996. Songs about the fight to bring justice and to vanquish oppression thus figure strongly in the mythology of the Taliban.

The ideal type of warrior for a Talib is the *ghazi*, literally translated from the Arabic (but is used throughout the Muslim world) as "Islamic warrior" but also a loosely approximate alternative for the term "mujahed", albeit one with different cultural and historic connotations.[211] The *ghazi*, according to the descriptions given in the poems, is someone who fights for the right reasons, who does so with zeal and energy and who is self-sacrificing in how he goes about his mission. The kinds of values that he stands for are those expressed in the previous section, but as a shorthand this is often summarised as him having to 'protect or defend the weak and the oppressed'. Note that the term 'jihad' is not used as frequently as one might expect — except in the alternate forms 'mujahed' or mujahedeen — and that ghazi is a far more widespread way of referencing the Islamic context to the fight in which they are engaged.

Sacrifice is a central part of what a good ghazi is supposed to stand for. This is not a self-centred fight, but rather something where each individual fits into a larger whole.

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210. Arghandabi, 1998b.

211. With *mujahed*, the religious connotations (fighting on the right path, making an effort for God that could result in martyrdom, as well as being part of a long tradition of those who took the title *mujahed*) were emphasised. With *ghazi*, the martial characteristics were stressed (someone's prowess on the battlefield, their courage, their skill) even though it remains a term that brings some religious depth.

They are dedicated to a cause rather than carrying it out for themselves. The image of a moth drawn to a flame is a common one in Pashto literature — a favourite used in love poetry across the region, in fact — and it features in the Taliban's poetry too:

Like a moth I am in love with fire
Though I am burnt to ashes, I like the battlefield[212]

Even when the poets extoll the need for disinterested sacrifice, they often pair this with a wish that their memory or name will go down in history, or that they will be remembered:

The valour of those will always be sung
Those who sacrificed their tender youth for the sake of freedom.[213]

Another ideal praised by many poets is that of the untiring or unceasing fighter. He who fights should not be lazy. This was expressed earlier but in a more general sense. The ideal in the context of the battlefield is this:

We want a life with dignity, with shari'a
It is not like resting in the afternoon sun[214]

Paired with the fighter's ability to be unceasing in their zeal is the expectation that they will not be concerned with comfort:

"This trench is my bed
It is better than my own bed [at home] for me"[215]

212. Anwari, Unknown.
213. Unknown, Unknown-2.
214. Qiyam, Unknown.
215. Unknown, Unknown-4.

Indeed, the concept of the trench or *sangar* is one where comfort and indolence are put on hold. To this day, the need to tolerate discomfort — even sometimes to seek it out to prove that you can take more than the others around you — is something that Kandaharis of a certain age and background value.

The sword, the shield and the cry of *takbir* are all things that are raised quite often by the poets in association with the battlefield. The sword — often used to behead 'the enemy' — was seen as traditional and following in the Prophet's footsteps, though other more modern weapons are also mentioned. The sword is also seen as a way of connecting with the past, or somehow as a means of channeling history. Poems with many historical references often begin with references to swords, as in Abdul Hamid Turabi's poem, 'Prophet's History':

Let's take up our swords and revive the Prophet's history
As Abraham we will defeat the Nimrod of our time[…][216]

The poems facilitate a kind of imaginative time-travel, as if by fighting in Afghanistan you could also somehow come closer to fighting together with the Prophet. Such poems easily shift from references to this imagined past to discussions of Pharaonic Egypt with considerable ease.

The sword itself is often accompanied by descriptions of what it sounds like when it is used. These are active, vivid and noisy battlefield pictures.

The sound of their sword reaches up to the skies
When the armed ghazis raised the slogan of 'God is Great'[217]

216. Turabi, 2001.
217. Ghairatmal, Unknown.

Finally, there is a paradoxical mention of the Taliban as being peacemakers in amongst the war poems. This is a corollary to their self-conception as being the group that brought an end to the civil war of the 1990s rather than just being the most successful of many participants in that civil war. Note, too, that some poets see their poems as weapons of war, and they try to make them loud and clangy with the sounds of battle, summoning all the tropes and images of war, only to tell you in the final line that they are doing this with words and poems.[218]

(3) Artistic

A third set of poems can be more loosely defined as artistic responses. The imagery of light and dark figures heavily in these, and in the corpus as a whole. It ties into the first two sets as an overarching context:

"They have lit the candle of justice in complete darkness"[219]

Also, to bring in the natural imagery, the dawn is the perfect symbol of this:

In the hope of waiting for dawn
And again, the separation becomes lost in the struggle with darkness
And
In the middle of the dark night
They hope for the light[220]

And also:

"Today a new sun shines over this land

218. Unknown, Unknown-3.
219. Sadiq, Unknown.
220. Shekib, 1997.

Today a new flower blossomed in this garden
Today a new spirit has entered this body
Today a new life has started"[221]

The Taliban are presented as a new dawn, as a movement of light and of purity that works against the darkness and associated forces. The values that they stand for are what power the light and what drive the darkness away. It is not so much the individuals who are represented by the light as the values themselves.

Not to say that all the poems are uniformly like these. Take this poem by Mullah Noor Mohammad Shkeb, entitled "Resilience":

My life, be stormy and tumultuous
Forget about the light, bring dark nights
We don't need your springs, bring autumns
Give us the adventures of love
I am not satisfied with wreaths of flowers
I like my life full of epic deeds[222]

In this short poem, the poet embraces the darkness and his "epic deeds" in a contrast to the light offered in other verses. This creates a useful dynamic contrast although it does not fit in the overwhelming pattern of imagery going in the other direction.

Another natural image that comes up is that of the storm that drowns. This refers to the cleansing and purging characteristics of the Taliban, like a storm that purifies of that cleanses, like a wave that drowns everything in its path but that, after passing, leaves things purer in its path. This fits in with the general asceticism of the movement as well.

Storms are not the only thing to nourish the soil. Blood is frequently presented as a sort of spiritual fertiliser:

221. Unknown, Unknown-1.
222. Shekib, Unknown.

"The blood of martyrs will
Make blossom the flowers of hopes"[223]

Not that this is not a unique image to the Taliban, but one they have adopted from the language and rhetoric of the 1980s *jihad* — a forge that was, as I mention elsewhere in this research, important for shaping most aspects of the movement.

"O, country, your sign of bravery has been shown to the world
I will make you free, O country of red flowers
I, Sa'idi, am writing your history with my blood
Whatever I do with my life, you are my body and soul"[224]

Blood is also presented as a means of writing history:

"With my blood I will make a garden for you, O Afghan"[225]

This comes up regularly in interviews and discussions with Talibs to this day. Blood (as well as the associated sacrifice) is seen as a way of writing a new path for oneself. Indeed, blood is a visual representation of the kind of sacrifice that is encouraged in the movement, albeit not always one that is expected to be delivered.

Mixed in with the natural imagery are recurring references to cleanliness and purity:

"The youth always fight for your clean, unpolluted soil"[226]

223. Waqad, Unknown.
224. Sa'idi, 1997.
225. Sa'idi, 1997.
226. Sa'idi, 1997.

There is occasional talk of the martyrs as having "taken a bath of blood"[227] or that the values that they are fighting for functioning as a kind of cleanser:

You remove from our faces the arrogance of the cruel
You washed it with the soap of justice and fairness
Now, to us, our unfamiliar faces are looking familiar
Our sacred wish which was to be had in return for our blood[228]

Finally, to conclude the natural metaphors, there's a poem firmly set in the *gham* mode mentioned earlier, one that leaves open an implied possibility of a reversal of its fate:

I am caught now like a bird in the cage of inevitability
I cannot fly; my wings and feathers are bloodied
I am not blind, I am crippled and my sensation is throbbing
My eyes are burning because my sight is bloodied
I am crying night and day; this red blood
Sunset, I am sinking in blood, my spine is bloodied
My taste and complexion have both showered in blood
Today Khotab's poem; every part of me is bloodied[229]

These were the values for which the movement stands, the martial manner by which they can be imposed and enacted, and the natural imagery which sets the context for these imaginative visions of the movement's role in the world. Brought together, this is a compelling imaginative universe, one that the aural universe of song and the intonations combine to form an art form that offers an emotional backdrop to the political and religious activities of the Taliban.

227. Sa'eed, Unknown.
228. Arghandabi, 1998a.
229. Khotab, 1995.

(v) Emotion and the Taliban

The role that emotion plays in the everyday lives of Afghans is not something that has been much studied, but often an aesthetic is bound up with emotions.[230] It applies as much to those affiliated with the Taliban as it does to those who have nothing to do with the movement.

There have been glimpses of this additional dimension — Thomas Dworzak's photos of Talibs that he recovered in 2001 from old photographers' booths in Kandahar, or numerous images of Talibs with kohl applied to their eyes.[231] Usually, however, these images are seen and described as 'foreign' or 'other'.

The matter of emotional resonance is extremely important for the Taliban: without it, the poems would probably not be consumed as widely and as avidly as they are. Emotion can be a powerful motivating factor, even for the unaffiliated. It is often discounted in analyses of how the Taliban are, or who those fighting are; their emotional response to the situation around them is a key part of that identity.

One of the more interesting aspects of these poems is the fact that they represent (for the most part, and as far as we are aware) uncensored voices from within the Taliban. Not all of the poems published nowadays may come from the cultural committee itself, but, by posting them on their website and/or in their newspapers, this brings an endorsement of its own. It is, by this token, one of the only ways we have to get a sense of the thoughts and feelings of a wider selection of those within the movement outside of individual interviews and formulaic press releases.

Indeed, it is the first time so many voices from the Taliban are given expression in a manner that is not confined to what we might term the purely political, or the purely religious. It seems that these poems are not considered something to censor. They are a manifestation, an expression — part of who they are. It is not politics, but identity.

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230. Grima, 2005.

231. See examples at http://www.magnumphotos.com/c.aspx?Vp=XSpecific_MaG.bookDetail_Vpage&pid=2K7o3r180KMo (accessed January 24, 2012).

(d) *Afghaniyaat* and being Pashtun

> *"The other possibly primary social identity is ethnicity. There is debate about whether ethnicity is primordial, i.e. essential and unchanging, or situational, i.e. as manipulable as circumstances demand or allow (Bentley 1987; Eller and Coughlan 1993). If ethnicity can be considered a primary social identity, in my terms, it may offer a middle ground for this debate. So, how 'primary' is ethnicity? Ethnicity is a collective identity which may have a massive presence in the experience of individuals. Ethnic identity […] is often an important and early dimension of self-identification."*[232]

The Taliban have often been characterised as a Pashtun movement, where in reality it is more accurate to state that they are a movement with many Pashtun members.[233] In the post-2001 period, the suggestion that the conflict in Afghanistan would end were it not for these overt tribal and ethnic tensions is not supported by the evidence. At the same time, it is not enough simply to dismiss the claims of a tribal dimension to the Taliban movement. It is relevant to how the Taliban built coalitions, and to how they interacted with other groups around Afghanistan. Customs that were deeply embedded in their culture — the so-called *pashtunwali*, about which more below — were important in offering default pathways for action.

The 1980s *jihad* had a transformative effect on tribal structures across the country. This was particularly the case in southern Afghanistan. The traditional tribal leadership was replaced by commanders, who rose to power due to their military prowess, and were able to consolidate their hold over tribes, or sections of tribes through using the influx of money to buy land.[234] Southern Afghanistan's tribal structures were, in any case, degenerating even prior to the outbreak of conflict, but the ten-year period in which most traditionally respect tribal elders were killed or forced to flee the country opened up space for others to take their place. (See chapter four for more on these effects).

Post-1994, the Taliban did employ tribal means to speed their expansion to new areas, once it became part of their agenda to move outside familiar territory, that is. Once

232. Jenkins, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1329-36.

233. Johnson and Mason, 2007.

234. Interviews, Southern Afghanistan, 2006-2011.

again, this is not proof of the fact that they were a 'tribal movement', but rather that they chose to employ tribal methods that facilitated their movement and expansion. The Taliban were always wary of becoming an ethnically chauvinist movement, and an inspection of statements and actions taken during their rule, for example, reveals a strict effort to avoid making statements of any kind that suggested that they only sought to represent Pashtuns. See, for example, the editorial published in October 1997, which stated:

> *"They wanted to show that the Islamic movement of Taliban belongs to one linguistic and one tribe in the country. They added that because of this it cannot have in other parts of Afghanistan political and military influence. The recent development in the north of the country have proved the fact that the Taliban Islamic Movement in conquering Baghlan, Kundoz, the township of Hiratan, Qala jangi, the airport of Balkh, the rocket Brigade of the Balkh province and capturing the villages on the outskirt of Mazar Sharif, the surrounding of the city of Mazar Sharif, all this proved the fact that the Taliban Islamic Movement of Afghanistan has the endurances with the support of the Muslim people of Afghanistan together with jihadist forces of Kundoz and Baghlan and with attempts of all the Jihadist forces of the north of the country to come to such successes. In this success the tribes and ethnic groups of the Muslim people resident in the north of the country have their share.This reality is proof enough of the developments of political and military in the north of the country that the Islamic movement of Afghanistan is a country wide religious and national power of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This movement and does not belong to any particular tribe, nation or region and will continue not to be held tied to any such labels."*[235]

Similarly, the authors of an article in *Anis* in November 2000 reacted to claims that the movement was ethnically discriminatory:

> *"as a matter of fact, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has organized all its programmes on the basis of the formidable rules of the Koran. There is only the dominance of the Koran. According to the Koran, the superiority of one person over another is because of his fear of God. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is formed of all citizens of the country, Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Turkmen and other ethnic groups. All ethnic groups are like a single body and everyone is given a responsibility in line with the Islamic law and on the basis of necessity. When foreigners speak of ethnic groups they are in fact trying to cause division among fraternal ethnic groups and to divert water, as a saying goes, to the mill of the enemy.*
>
> *However, our people have witnessed the bitter reality of the kinds of crimes faction chiefs committed in the name of ethnic groups and tribes. Our nation now knows the truth, which is that the secret of victory and honour is unity on the basis of lofty Muhammadan Shari'ah.*

235. Editorial team, 1997h.

Therefore, unity should be highly valued and the nation should not allow itself to be deceived."[236]

Note that these are explicit denials. The lack of an ethnic discourse as part of their official pronouncements can only be proved by its absence, thus is hard to display here. Their religious narrative — 'security and justice under Islam' — offset their need to rely on ethnic labels, and as such, they were initially quite effective in convincing others that they sought to act impartially, at least where ethnicity was concerned.

Senior Taliban leadership figures were brought up in an environment where the broad concepts of *pashtunwali* — of hospitality, succour to those seeking protection, and of *nang* or honour — were engrained in the cultural context, especially through the stories, songs and poems that were recited. As such, it was the default position for them to rely on these.

At the same time, the Taliban sought to identify themselves as a supra-ethnic (and sometimes supra-nationalistic) movement, one where Islamic concepts were the highest authority. During their period of rule, they even sought to overturn some customs that had become entrenched in Pashtun society, but which they said were un-Islamic.

Their freshly-commissioned national anthem, the words of which were written by Abdul Basir Ebrat during the early 1990s, make no strong ethnic or Pashtun allusions, choosing instead to refer to Islamic or other national symbols:

It is shining, the land of mysticism,
This is the homeland of Muslims.
It's the beloved homeland, Afghanistan.
It's the beloved homeland, Afghanistan.

We have a good beautiful history,

236. Editorial team, 2000l.

We have great, great Ulemaa'.
We have the enthusiasm of
Ahmad and Mahmud for independence.

It's a land beautified by the Qur'an
It's the beloved homeland, Afghanistan.

We have our fertile soil,
We have gold in our mountains.
The Haidari sword in our hand,
We have Omar's intent.

We will build our homeland again,
The beloved homeland, Afghanistan.

We defeated the warrior Genghis,
We then turned Russians into pieces.
We are getting knowledge and doing jihad,
Our sword's blow is sharp.

It's the land remembered by every Afghan,
It's the beloved homeland, Afghanistan.

We have a good shining life,
We have the good right name, "Afghan."
Each of our enemies is escaping,
We have our God and faith.

This is the land of heroes,
It's the beloved homeland, Afghanistan.

May it live forever, it's a champion,
O God, it's like a flower.
May it be united,

Always, always.[237]

Most prominent of these were their laws against the custom of pledging young girls or women in marriage to others as a means of settling disagreements (personal or financial, for the most part).[238] This is often brought up by interviewees as proof of their supra-ethnic agenda. Nevertheless, the institutional framework (rather than the final tool) remained central to resolving local conflict.

As discussed earlier, the Taliban introduced incremental changes, and the central leadership, along with part of the government apparatus in Kabul was engaged in revisiting past laws to reform them. This would extend to tribal customs and informal justice mechanisms that were adhered to by rural communities. At times it became apparent how introducing change among their core constituency was handled significantly differently from how policy was implemented in the field. For the move to take territory in the north, for example, the Taliban used networks of Mullahs from non-Pashtun communities, in part because they realised they would have to engage in 'ethnic' mobilisation in order to achieve their goals.[239] In Paktya, Giustozzi has also noted how the Taliban's initial assumption of power was handled deftly at first, with considerably autonomy and authority resting in the hands of the local jirgas.[240]

(i) Ethnicity, Mullah Mohammad Omar and the Taliban

Assessing the Taliban's perspective on ethnicity is difficult to judge many years after the fact. There are few explicit statements from senior figures, and there are inherent problems in using those kinds of statements as the sole basis of a discussion of

237. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b, 74-75.

238. See, for example, "Decree of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on Women's Rights in Society" which stated that "In case of a murder, the Muslim citizens of the country cannot offer a woman to the family of the deceased in lieu of a blood fine (Deyet) or a compromise under any other pretext" and also (article two) "Muslim citizens of the country cannot force a widow to marry a member of her husband's family. A widow can marry by her own choice, in accordance with the Sharia provisions" (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 48).

239. Giustozzi, 2013, 80-81.

240. Giustozzi, 2013, 83.

attitudes towards ethnicity in the Taliban. Moreover, the times when they did mention ethnicity it was usually to dismiss it entirely as something they cared about.

There are some intriguing comments from Mullah Mohammad Omar on ethnicity gleaned from interviews. In October 1998, in a meeting with Lakhdar Brahimi, he reportedly endorsed the idea of greater ethnic representation in the Taliban's government — something that Brahimi had brought up as representative of the international community at the time. Similarly, in March 1999, in a meeting with Russian representative Shikhmuradov, Mullah Omar stated that he "had no problem with the inclusion of [...] more representatives from the ethnic minorities."[241]

In an earlier conversation with Massoud, however, he was less pragmatic:

> *"The Taliban, he said, wanted its emirate. "We have made these sacrifices for the emirate, and we will continue to do so." The conversation was drawing to a close. If Massoud did not want to cooperate, he could leave the country, Omar said. "Tajiks should go to Tajikistan, Uzbeks to Uzbekistan, Hazaras to Iran. We are Afghans. This is our land."*[242]

In this case, he was using 'Afghan' to mean Pashtun.

(ii) State policy

Overall the Taliban don't seem to have to clear an ethnic policy. In general, they tried to rise above ethnicity as a means of identification once they had taken over the control of power in Afghanistan post-1995/6. They were attempting to impose an Islamic system, one which would not make reference to tribe and/or ethnicity. In many cases, they were able to rise above this ethnicity, and, in aspiration at the very least, this was something new at the time, where ethnic polarisation was *de rigeur*.

Islam, as I said, was their idealised substitute that was offered up as a way of bringing people together.

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241. Murshed, 2006, 265.

242. Gutman, 2008, 112. Gutman claims this conversation took place in September 1997.

The example of Mohammad was key. As leader of the new movement, he was invested with both religious authority as well as semi-tribal authority — i.e. his ability to mediate between groups, which was there also because of his track record — and his legitimation by the tribes who were backing him in the beginning and who supported him later on as well. He became a supra-tribal figure, although he participated in the system in the beginning — interfering with the Quraysh after they refused to let him into Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, for example. There was also the massacre of the Qurayza Jews in which all the men of the tribe were killed; this fulfilled a tribal function.[243]

Ethnic disputes were definitely a feature of life in Afghanistan at the time of the Taliban's founding. The ethnic status quo had changed as a result of the 1980s war and the subsequent conflict economy was fuelled to a large extent by external parties. In some cases, the Taliban were unable able to rise above ethnic disputes. These incidents can be divided into two broad categories: actions taken by individuals outside the advice or purview of their seniors; or, secondly, when motivated by the weight of their own Pashtun rural backgrounds.

This Ph.D. will explore some examples of both these kinds. Mullah Dadullah is a clear case of the first instance, where idiosyncrasies and pathologies particular to that individual seem to have motivated him in the case of Yakawlang, for instance. He is believed to have had a supervisory role in the massacre of at least 176 civilians.[244]

For the Taliban, there was an attempt, at least initially, to recruit from a broad base of ethnic groups — i.e. without regard to ethnicity. This was similar to how other political parties had approached the challenge of ruling over all of Afghanistan. That being said, Dorronsoro has explained how while this may have been the case for the lowest ranks, leaderships of political parties during the 1970s and 1980s tended to be dominated by one ethnic group or section.[245] Reality impinged on their desires, however, and they were increasingly forced to recruit from within those ethnic groups where they were most comfortable. For the Taliban, this was the Pashtuns.

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243. Djaït, 1988; Aslan, 2011, 91-95.

244. Gutman, 2008, 224.

245. Dorronsoro, 2005, 162-4, 265.

A strong argument for the Taliban as "a Pashtun movement" has been made by several analysts since the beginning.[246]

There is a distinction to be made between the Taliban as a "Pashtun movement" and the Taliban as a movement "with a lot of Pashtuns." The reality is closer to the latter. It is this which is most often cited in analyses of the Taliban's backgrounds. First, their ethnicity of most of the senior tiers is mentioned, and then this is broken down tribally into sub-groups, and so on.

Prominent non-Pashtuns in the Taliban senior ranks included:[247]

Name	Ethnic background	Position	Home province
Qari Din Mohammad Hanif	Tajik	Minister of Higher Education	Badakhshan
Mawlawi Abdul Raqib	Uzbek	Minister of Immigration	Takhar
Makhdum Abd us-Salam	Tajik	Minister of Labour and Social Affairs	Baghlan
Mawlawi Ghiasuddin Agha	Uzbek	Minister of Hajj and Awqaf; Minister of Education	Faryab
Mohammad Omar Faruqi	Tajik	Minister of Statistics	Paktika
Mawlawi Sa'id al-Rahman	Pashayi	Ambassador to Pakistan	Laghman
Mawlawi Jalilullah Mawlawi Zadah	Tajik	Deputy Supreme Court Judge	Herat
Zia ur-Rehman Madani	Tajik	Lowgar governor	Takhar
Mawlawi Shamsuddin Pahlawan	Tajik	Paktya (and Wardak) governor	Badakhshan
Mawlawi Mohammad Islam Mohammadi	Tatar	Bamyan governor	Samangan
Makhdum Abd ul-Haq	Tajik	Wardak governor	Badakhshan
Abd us-Salaam Hanafi	Uzbek	Deputy Minister of Education	Faryab
Saeed Ahmad Shahid Khel	Tajik	Deputy Minister of Education	Ghazni

Figure 3: Non-Pashtuns in the senior Taliban leadership

246. See, for example, Rashid, 1996b and Kleiner, 2000 from the pre-2001 period.

247. It is worth noting that the national-level military leadership was, as far as the data gathered thus far shows, exclusively in the control of Pashtuns (from different parts of the country, but with a tendency towards the south).

The Taliban, in many ways, operated in contradiction to their Pashtun tribal roots. Tribes were not represented in their own right within the movement, and all public statements were clear to state that ethnicity was not the motivating factor behind the group. The Pashtun tribal practices of giving young girls in marriage as compensation in feuds and murder cases, for example, was something that the Taliban forbade.

They incorporated some aspects, however. Their education policy was something that rural Pashtuns from the south would have understood, but rolled out across the country it went down not as well. Culturally, the *tarana* explored above were incorporated as part of the movement's identity. These were then expanded across the country as the main cultural output and permitted form of self-expression. The same extends to other poetry. The Taliban also acted against Persianate cultural expression.[248] The educational curriculum emphasised materials in Pashto and Arabic, for example, at the expense of those in Dari.

Somewhat unusually, explicit appeals to Pashtun solidarity in 1995 have been reported when Ismael Khan made a concerted move to strike southern Afghanistan and Kandahar.[249] This was an anomaly, however, and it was not the norm in terms of the movement's public pronouncements.

For the most part, being Pashtun functioned as a mobiliser and a sense of shared identity for the Taliban movement. It offered a readily-available historical baseline on many issues and approaches, a shared consciousness on which members and leaders alike could rely. Taking that into consideration, however, ethnicity and tribe operated more as contextual factors rather than as a motivating factor. In this way, it (sometimes) determined the outcome of events, or the instinctual responses of individuals, by default rather than through choice. It is important to emphasise this.

As we shall see in chapters 5 and 6, the Taliban's senior leadership — especially those with a mind to shape the direction of the movement — were wise to tribal and ethnic

248. Siddique, 2014, 57-58; Dorronsoro, 2005, 268.

249. Dorronsoro, 2005, 268.

dynamics, both on a national as well as local level. They used it when they found it useful, particularly in 1994-5 when many different factors pushed against their fledgling efforts. Yet they were also idealists who sought to carve a new direction for politics and society in Afghanistan. It is not hard to find plentiful evidence for their efforts to decouple and deemphasise ethnicity and tribe going forward, albeit to varying degrees of success). Ultimately, we can never know how serious they were about this project because their trajectory was cut short by the attacks in the United States in September 2001.

The cultural output of the movement — broadly synonymous with the songs written during the time, though not limited to just this — was taken seriously by the Taliban and they used it effectively to cement a new identity for the movement. It drew on older traditions and, properly focused, offered an emotional identity for affiliates rather than something purely aesthetic. This in turn helped generate a shared emotion-bound solidarity for those involved in the movement. In fact, this identity and corpus was so much part of the general fabric of cultural life that the movement had no need to take responsibility for writing these songs themselves. The simplicity of this self-generating characteristic of their cultural identity is another reason why the movement was so quick to coalesce and find support in the beginning, as we shall see in the next chapter.

4. A Hand-Me-Down State?

"The Taliban are unified, but they are not 100% under the control of one person."

Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil, former Taliban Interior Minister[250]

"coherent [but not] monolithic"

Gilles Dorronsoro, 2005[251]

The Taliban who took Kabul in 1996 were unfamiliar with the exercise of power on a large scale. They built a system that was partly inherited from others' previous attempts at national governance, with some added features derived from their experiences during the 1980s *jihad* in greater Kandahar and from what they had learned as students and scholars. The political and institutional identity of the movement — presented in this chapter — is not only the way they were ruling but how they chose to present themselves to other groups and the world in this regard. Only by viewing both presentation and the reality on the ground are we able to get a comprehensive sense of how they approached and understood the exercise of power.

The competing formal and informal institutions that governed the Taliban movement created a complicated system of internal power structures. With a primary concern for local issues and their constituency — the rural population from which they had evolved — Taliban behaviour and messaging sometimes seemed hermetically sealed off from outside parties.

Like all other organisations, the official policy of the Taliban movement sometimes didn't match the actions of those running or administering it. This is an important distinction. Analyses of the Taliban in power are often dominated by specific events and their behaviour as reported from urban centres, in particular, Kabul. A few

250. Totakhil and Abi-Habib, 2012.

251. Dorronsoro, 2005, 275.

individuals became infamous, even among the Taliban themselves, such as Mullah (now Mawlawi) Qalamuddin, one of the heads of the *Amr bil Marouf* ministry.

The Taliban were products of their environment in how they ended up building their movement. They were not creating a movement from scratch, nor were they ignorant of the various social, cultural and political building blocks available to them. More importantly, the justifications and vision for the movement shifted as time passed. From 1994-5, their vision was highly localised and expansion only gradually became something that they considered, in part on account of pressure and encouragement from territories neighbouring that which they controlled. At a certain point in 1995, it became clear that there was considerable appetite around the country for a force that could supplant and do away with the fragmented groups that had come to prey on different parts of the country.

This chapter examines the various factors that made up the Taliban's political inheritance and starts to address some of the ways they adapted this system. (The practical experience of ruling and the negotiations over those precise mechanics will be examined in chapters five and six.) I begin with an examination of the influences of the 1980s war, in particular looking at how it helped establish a certain collective identity.[252] I then describe the inherited practices, systems and traditions surrounding the exercise of power, focusing on the movement's early statements and writings. The chapter closes with an evaluation of the extent to which the developments of the 1980s and early 1990s constituted a significant or 'revolutionary' social change.

252. "Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of inter- actions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabling some claims and deeds but delegitimating others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 298). This is known by various terms in academia (social identity, personal identity, relational identity, social roles) and there is a poor standardisation of terms employed (Ashmore *et al.*, 2004).

(a) The *jihad*

The 1980s *jihad* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan was a pivotal experience for most of the Taliban leadership. While most didn't play a major role at the time due to their age and status, the *jihad* not only consolidated the networks that would later rise to form the Taliban movement but taught them key lessons in the interaction between armed groups. The negotiations, compromises and discussions at the time were one of the primary examples to the Taliban of how relations were managed. The Taliban would play a central role in conflict resolution and arbitration efforts, as support staff of the Islamic courts that were addressing the issues that arose between different mujahideen fronts.

The experience shaped the Taliban's identity in several major ways. The trenches created a sense of fraternity, one far more tangible and durable than simply growing up with other students and receiving an education at a madrassa or other religious institution. Moreover, their identity was shaped by witnessing the transformation and disruption of society at large, the sidelining of the old tribal hierarchy, in which military strongmen or charismatic religious leaders eclipsed these traditional structures, in part simply due to their presence inside Afghanistan instead of being in Pakistan, away from the fighting. Their status was elevated in other ways, too, particularly from the power their leaders wielded in the religious courts which fulfilled an important function throughout the 1980s *jihad*, in particular in southern Afghanistan. In a blend not uncommon to what would emerge in the mid-1990s in the south, Mullahs would set up structures that would provide conflict mitigation and pass judgements, issue edicts and fatwas, often primarily concerned with issues that arose between different mujahedeen groups and factions or among the local population.[253]

During the 1980s, the balance between the *shari'a* and the customary practices associated with *pashtunwali* was perhaps easier to negotiate because the rise of the religious clergy saw them usurp the functions and roles of the Pashtun tribal elites. Their departure — they moved out of the country or disappeared in several waves of

253. Interviews, Kandahar, 2008-11.

Afghan government arrests — left a vacuum which the religious clerics and their students filled. During the 1980s, the courts run by the clergy were visited for dispute resolution in a similar fashion to how Pashtun elders would have been consulted. It was only post-Soviet withdrawal and in the early discussions and actions of the Taliban's government proper (from 1993/4 onwards) that the religious interpretations started to take precedence over the customary or tribal.

The influence of the experience of the 1980s is apparent in the early Taliban movement's organisational structure that mirrored those of the mujahideen parties of the 1980s *jihad*. It was a direct result of the experiences of the hundreds of Taliban commanders and dozens of Taliban fronts that could be found in Loy Kandahar at the time.[254]

The *jihad* also gave them an idea of social transformation, that change was possible and that men could influence their path. In the past, society was relatively static and the way to move forward was through exploiting the state to advance one's position in the community.[255] The *jihad* showed that there were other ways, that men who came from nothing could become commanders, and that unity could make one strong.

The transformative and traumatic impact of Afghanistan's *jihad*, in particular in southern Afghanistan, gave rise to new stronger networks forged throughout. The answer to Roy's question posed in an article published in 1995[256] (why did the Taliban all of a sudden start to be by far more coordinated and mobilised as a distinct group?) is to be found on the battlefields of the Afghan *jihad*.

The mujahedeen can, broadly speaking, be characterised as a force of religious nationalists: communities — particularly those from rural areas — were motivated to participate in the *jihad* by religious fatwas sanctioning *jihad*, but also to protect their land, their villages, traditions and customs. Many of the individual groups that were

254. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 45.
255. Roy, 1995.
256. Roy, 1995.

fighting in southern, eastern and southeastern Afghanistan developed along tribal lines, often presenting relative homogeneity; examples of these include the factions fighting under the leadership of Mullah Naqibullah in Arghandab who was heading the Alikozai tribe, with only small groupings of Barakzai and other Durrani tribal members.[257]

The Taliban, in particular, were a young group, and most either had just finished or had to interrupt their religious studies. In any case, the personalities that would become prominent in 1994 had little significance during the 1980s *jihad*; with a few exceptions, most were only small commanders or fighters.[258] The initial fighters who took up arms were not yet subject to the religious fatwas that would be issued from early 1980 onwards in Afghanistan and neighbouring Baluchistan province but were reacting to specific circumstances. Dorronsoro notes:

> *"In 1978-9 the people did not mobilise against the communist government in the name of an ideology: militants were rare among the rural population, and their rhetoric — including that of the Islamists — was incomprehensible to a population whose literacy was as undeveloped as its politicisation. The political parties had not made themselves known, or indeed were not established at all, until after the uprising, which they exploited but did not initiate."*[259]

Another interviewee — who later worked as a Taliban government official in Kandahar and Khost — noted the primitive early days of the jihad:

> *"When I was young my father was a Mullah and a commander of one otaq in Panjwayi district. My father called on people to do jihad, saying that jihad was farz [obligatory] for every single Muslim. We had all the taliban with us, of course, in the otaq, but also lots of ordinary people as well. Many people had swords, old guns, knives, wooden sticks and some iron bars. That's how we were fighting in the beginning."*[260]

257. Gumnam, 2014; Gumnam, 2016.

258. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, 2009-2010.

259. Dorronsoro, 2005, 105.

260. Interview, Kabul, June 2010.

There were Talibs and religious clerics among the initial commanders that took up arms, most famous of whom was Mullah Mohammad Sadiq Akhund. In the early 1980s, most of the manpower for the Taliban fronts was supplied by Mawlawi Nabi Mohammadi's *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami*. *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami* was a political party set up initially to encompass all the mujahedeen but (following squabbles among the senior mujahedeen leaders) later kept running[261] as a party representing the (mainly rural) religious clergy of southern and south-eastern Afghanistan.[262]

In greater Kandahar, there were hundreds of Taliban commanders[263] and dozens of Taliban fronts. Early incarnations saw the transformation of local madrassas into mujahedeen fronts, with the mullah leading his students or *taliban* as commander.[264] The Taliban sought to distinguish themselves from other mujahedeen groups by offering a more ostentatiously religious *jihad* to those who fought with them. The five daily prayers were observed and religious classes were offered for those not actively participating on the front lines. According to people who were part of the Taliban fronts[265] as well as members of other mujahedeen groups[266] operating in proximity of the Taliban fronts, the general atmosphere among the Taliban was different. The religious element was more pronounced, and they came across to other groups as more serious, more intense, or almost bookish.[267]

The Taliban fronts also distinguished themselves by their composition of membership. As mentioned above, mujahedeen fronts in southern Afghanistan like in other regions tended to be structured along tribal and kinship lines; the Taliban, however, were connected by their common educational background and the pursuit of religious studies. While commentators today often argue that the Taliban represent a confederation of Ghilzai Pashtun tribes due to the disproportionate presence of

261. At the behest of Mawlana Fazulur Rahman.

262. Edwards, 2002, 244-247.

263. A 'commander' in terms of the mujahedeen fronts was anyone with men serving underneath them. It does not necessarily imply a large or important position.

264. Roy, 1995.

265. Interview, Kabul City, April 2009.

266. Interview, Kandahar City, (mujahed who fought in Mahalajat and Kandahar city) May 2010; Interview with Talib who fought in Panjwayi and Kandahar City, May 2009.

267. Interviews, Kandahar, summer 2008 & 2009.

Ghilzai Pashtuns in the group — the argument runs that they therefore represent a group that evolved out of a long-standing conflict between the two major Pashtun tribal branches of southern Afghanistan and in essence evolved out of tribal structures — the group itself publicly has always and continues to describe itself as having been formed on a religious basis. The disproportionate presence of Ghilzai Pashtuns among the Taliban can be better explained by socio-economic factors that caused more Ghilzai Pashtuns to seek religious education as well as increased numbers of certain groups in certain areas.[268] Within the context of rural southern Afghanistan, sending one's sons to a madrassa would lift the burden on a household to provide for them. Ghilzai Pashtuns throughout much of Afghanistan's modern history were dominated by Durrani Pashtuns, and were essentially poorer and therefore opted to send more children to madrassas. More research, however, is needed to assert this theory.[269]

Certain areas were more saturated by Taliban fronts than others. In particular, what we now know as Panjwayi and Zheray[270] districts — and the fertile triangle in between the two branches of the River Arghandab — were dominated by Taliban fronts. These areas were chronically underdeveloped and neglected by the state; many families in Kandahar would send at least one family member to study at a madrassa, but the trend was exaggerated in these districts/areas.[271]

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268. The Durrani presence within the Taliban's leadership circles was sufficiently common as to push against this idea. Out of a survey of 145 prominent figures (conducted by Anand Gopal), 38 were from Durrani tribes and 13 were of unknown background. Some prominent Durrani-background figures within the Taliban include: Qari Ahmadullah, Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rehmani, Mullah Mohammad Ghaus, Mullah Khaksar, Mawlawi Mohammad Wali, Mullah Nuruddin Turabi, Mullah Beradar, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, Mullah Mohammad Abbas, Mullah Mohammad Siddiq, Mullah Obaidullah, Mawlawi Ehsanullah Ehsan, Mullah Abdul Jalil and Mawlawi Aktar Mohammad Osmani. As you can see, the names are very prominent figures within the movement. It would be useful to have more data on the composition of the military sector, as well as officials on a provincial and district level, so as to explore this issue further, but so far this has proven elusive.

269. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2008-11.

270. Zheray district was formed only recently (i.e. post-2001) and people generally refer to Panjwayi to mean both districts.

271. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2008-10.

(i) 'Band of brothers'

One of the most important influences of the 1980s *jihad* is that it seems to have given those who participated a sense of confidence, commitment and a certain fraternal feeling. It was a shared experience beyond simply that of students studying together.

They had spent many years together, not always in the same group but almost always in some form of close proximity or contact. They were young, and they had experienced fierce combat. Many of them were orphans — not because of the war, but more likely the very low life expectancy of Afghans then (and now) — and the war instilled a very tight bond among the mujahedeen alumni.

As students before the war, they may have studied the principles of Islam, faith, commitment to one's religion and so on, but the war gave them a practical experience and test in all of these things. They emerged from Panjwayi at the end of the 1980s as graduates of a programme of study that was not just theoretical, but that had an emotional and practical resonance. The experience of the 1980s *jihad* would inform their later decisions when they attempted to govern the country.

For those who participated, the Afghan *jihad* was an experience without parallel. Even a cursory glance at the first-hand literature and accounts of the period from both groups confirms this: the long periods of boredom, the confusions and mistakes, the random timing of massively violent incidents and also the camaraderie of the trench. The mujahedeen fronts were also often places of deprivation, where one had to make do with limited resources and extremely restrictive circumstances.[272]

Mullah Zaeef's memoir gives a sense of that perspective:

> *"We fought on regardless of exhaustion, hunger and thirst, walking from Maiwand to Dand, from Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab to Panjwayi and other regions. We would even walk the hundred kilometres or so from Nelgham to Helmand or to Tirin Kot in Uruzgan. We would wear the same clothes for months at a time, surviving on just a loaf of bread or a few dates each day. Many were eager to fight, eager to die, especially young mujahedeen like myself.*

272. Interviewees told of eating grass when under heavy bombardment from Afghan and Soviet military forces, for example.

"We lived off the land and thanked those who donated food and money. People wanted to help just as we wanted to fight. If a commander left somebody out of an operation, that fighter would feel angry and disappointed. Just as normal people are eager to get married, we were desperate for martyrdom. At times you could hear mujahedeen cry out in the midst of battle, but not out of fear. Even though many of our friends were martyred, one after another, we weren't scared. We would have leapt at the first opportunity to run into open fire during battle, if only our commander hadn't reined us in. It is hard to believe, maybe, but we were happy. From time to time we danced the Atan, such was our elation. At other times we suffered grievously, but it was the true path: if one died, it was meant to be. What a happy life we led!"[273]

Akbar Agha echoes this, writing in 2014:

"It wasn't unusual for the mujahedeen to walk extremely long distances, even for twelve or thirteen hours. Journeys — such as going from Jelahor in Arghandab up to Siachoi in Panjwayi — were not easy, especially with all the Russian and puppet government forces there and because the mujahedeen didn't have any means of transportation.

There were other problems which were specific to these earlier phases of the jihad. These included walking long distances, air strikes and infantry pressure, surprise ambushes by the Russians, the lack of good weapons, poverty among the mujahedeen and public, and the relatively small number of mujahedeen in comparison with the enemy forces' troop numbers.

The victory of the Afghan mujahedeen over the Red and wild occupying forces proved the verse of the Holy Qur'an correct: "A group with a smaller number of people will overpower the larger group." This was similar to Talut's remaining group of followers who must not have numbered more than 1300. The Afghan mujahedeen also shared many points with those who fought at the battle of Badr, the Prophet's first battle. Muslims have put up with many problems and difficulties."[274]

This intense experience shaped members into a de facto, if informal, band of brothers. Those who were involved would take the lessons and networks that had developed and gravitate back towards them in the years that followed.

(ii) Ulemaa with power

The students and scholars who made up those fighting as part of the 'taliban' fronts during the 1980s would have had very little previous experience of agency or power in

273. Zaeef, 2010, 26.

274. Agha, 2014, 43.

society. Their role in society before the war was confined to a formal function, only being called on as a sort of seal of approval in certain situations: births, deaths, for certain mediations and for education, alongside mosque duties if there was a formal mosque building in a particular village.

The 1980s gave them experience of taking action and having an effect in society. As individuals, they were now armed and made decisions with an arguably far greater impact than they ever had before. They were granted a measure of power, too, from the respect that society at the time afforded to those who took up arms alongside other mujahedeen fighters. Through the courts, as we shall see below, they gained power and respect through the reality of their legislations as well as through the value that society granted to the religious sanction of what they were doing. Moreover, involvement in the doling out of 'justice' and the implementation of 'the shari'a' were now things that they had a practical experience in, one that often extended far beyond their years of study.

In the south, the late 1970s and early 1980s had also seen the decline of tribal influences inside Afghanistan. Elders were targeted by the Afghan government (and, later, by the Soviet armed forces) and many either disappeared or fled the country. This left a gap that was filled by those who took up arms. Some tribes managed to graft their tribal concerns onto the broader military agenda of the mujahedeen groups/ fighters (see above) but the overall trend was one of a declining influence.

In the south-east, to a greater extent than the south, we see a replacement of the old tribal Khans and Maliks by *mullah*s and *ulemaa*'.[275] Haqqani and Khalis represent a merger of the tribal support headed by an Islamist-inspired leadership who manage to merge with the Mullahs.

Haqqani and the 'mullah fronts' of greater Paktya were part of a larger tradition. The extended and totalising nature of the 1980s *jihad* extended the pattern, but the use of religious clergy as political tools was long-standing, particularly in south-eastern Afghanistan and the areas on the other side of the border.[276]

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275. Roy, 1995.

276. For the history of this tradition in the preceding century, see Haroon, 2007.

The fighters on the 'taliban' fronts still clung to their moral system amidst a breakdown of society around them. For this reason, they retained a sense of (moral) superiority throughout the 1990s. This exceptionalism manifested itself in the belief that they weren't just another faction amidst many mujahedeen factions; they believed, instead, that they were the group that would *end* factionalism.

(iii) Justice, courts and militarised power

Throughout the *jihad*, the religious clergy also operated courts that provided conflict mitigation and access to justice. Feuding mujahedeen groups, for example, would use the Taliban's court to settle disputes at times. Prisoners, criminals, and most other instances where judgement was needed would be handled in this way. As such, it was an important service and the mujahedeen respected the court's judgement for the most part.[277] Contemporaries of the *jihad* would almost always relate stories of infighting between different mujahedeen groups and commanders and the role of the Islamic mujahedeen courts.

The main court in southern Afghanistan was located in Mahalajat, initially run by Mawlawi Nazar Mohammad but then succeeded by Mawlawi Pasanai Saheb. For Kandahar, Mullah Samad Akhund had a court in Panjwayi, as did Mullah Naqib in Arghandab and Mullah Akhtar Jan in Spin Boldak. In Helmand, Mullah Nasim Akhundzada held the most-frequented court; Hafizullah Khan had a court for *Hizb-e Islami* and Mullah Atta Mohammad had a separate court in Sangin for those who did not wish to travel to that run by Mawlawi Pasanai Saheb in Kandahar.[278] These courts operated throughout the 1980s, though it was only in 1984/5 once the war had developed into patterns that saw the use of defined trenches (as opposed to sporadic guerrilla attacks or assassinations within the city) in the districts that saw the establishments of fixed locations. Certain courts were associated with certain

277. Interviews, southern Afghanistan, 2006-10.

278. Interviews, Kandahar, 2009-2010.

commanders and/or certain fronts, so their fates were also tied together somewhat in that way as well.

One former Taliban government official (who fought in Kandahar during the 1980s) explained how initially the courts were indistinguishable from the military clout of the *mullah*-commanders, but from around 1981/2 onwards these courts separated out as separate institutions.[279] Ayman Sabri Faraj, an Arab who fought in Kandahar during the late 1980s, described the courts as follows:

> *"…the Islamic courts were very strict and would even sentence commanders or field leaders if they did something wrong. One time, a battle took place between two commanders so they went to court and asked for its ruling. The judge decided to arrest them both and beat them up before throwing them in jail. This judge and his court gained great respect in the Kandahar area because of that."*[280]

There were two other locations where the Taliban operated courts: in Zangiabad and in Pashmol, two villages in Panjwayi district, although the latter was mobile for most of the time on account of heavy bombing in the area.[281]

The well-known and much-feared court operated by Mawlawi Pasanai Saheb, however, faced funding problems following the departure of the Soviet troops. This reminds us that many of the influences of the 1980s were internal rather than external. The 1980s war did not mean that those involved would spend the years following the end of the war seeking power. In fact, the opposite was often the case.[282] One interviewee related:

> *"The court of Mawlawi Pasanai Saheb, for example, had been getting some support from some people but in 1990 they stopped providing money and didn't have any support to be able to continue operating. For some time Sayyaf had given some money and later there was an ISI colonel who gave them money, but both stopped in the early 1990s. Pasanai Saheb was very weak and couldn't even gather together his court. After that the local people gave him some zakat and ushr so then he managed to restart his activities. Things picked up and it was an*

279. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

280. Faraj, 2002.

281. Interviews, Kandahar, 2008-2010 and Kabul, July 2010.

282. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 83-91.

important place during the civil war for people to bring their disputes, but still there was no outside support."[283]

The Islamic courts that operated throughout the south and whose judges, such as Mawlawi Pasanai, would come to play an important ideological role in the Taliban movement, symbolised the general shift: religious clergy, from the village *mullah* to the *'alim*, had increased in importance, a change that normally occurs in Afghanistan during times of *jihad* or war against an external enemy. Underlying this process is the uniting quality of Islam: while tribes and clans might fight against each other and feud for centuries, the common ground that can be found amongst them, in particular during times of great suffering, is their common belief.[284]

The Taliban's courts, too, were important as a reinforcement of fact that they saw themselves as the custodians of Islamic justice in the country as their teachers had been before them, and the *jihad* saw them apply their interpretation of these precepts in a way that had never been so prominent in the past because the state had assumed some of these functions.

(iv) Austerity

Austerity and the primacy of discipline were extremely important for the mujahideen taliban and the later Taliban movement alike. The 1980s, of course, were characterised by the absence of things: food, resources, money and so on. The taliban fighting at the time talk with a certain nostalgia for that time when looking back. They recall how having only a few possessions and their lack of other comforts helped focus their studies and their fighting. *Jihad* was emphasised to the extent that many of them saw their presence on the fronts and in the trenches as but one step away from *shahadat* or martyrdom, and accordingly there was no need for comforts. This was not unique to the taliban fronts, yet it seems to have been something that they were known for: a

283. Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.

284. Roy, 1990.

certain bookishness, seriousness and (in their view) a purity of purpose. They were, of course, very poor to start with, but later when they had more funding and a government to their name, this poverty and austerity became a value that they espoused and sought to emulate.

Discipline was the proper way towards fulfilling their purpose. Akbar Agha relates some of the innovations he brought to the front under his command:

> *"We tried our best to keep some sort of order to our front and to our daily duties. We registered all the weapons that we distributed to the mujahedeen and tried to keep them in good shape. Everyone was responsible for their own weapon. We held training sessions and gave five cartridges to use at the range to practice their aim. If we weren't in a battle or training, none of us carried weapons around with us.*
>
> *We organised a schedule of duties. Mujahedeen were required to pray their five prayers each day and anybody who violated this was assigned an additional two-hours of work or duties.*
>
> *Nobody was allowed to fire a single shot without the express and prior permission of the commander or head of the front. Violations were subject to punishment. We consulted each other for any decision that needed to be made concerning the front, major or minor. We had a meeting to calculate our accounts at the end of each month and helped the families of the mujahedeen who were extremely poor if we could."*[285]

There were some clear conditions that recruits to their party and their fronts were expected to pass before they were able to stay permanently attached to any particular front. This included the need to be studying at the same time, but it also included specifications on hairstyle and other details.[286]

This austerity on the 1980s fronts was something that they brought to their manner of rule post-1994. They took pride in the simplicity of the food that they ate, the fact that they sat on the floor instead of chairs, the fact that they didn't need mattresses on which to sleep and so on. This 'tough service' model was something they attempted all those working under their name to emulate, though it was impossible to regulate this properly. Many of the 'orders' issued by Mullah Mohammad Omar in the late 1990s and early 2000s were against violations of this specific theme, and the sheer number

285. Agha, 2014, 47.

286. Also see Zaeef's account of life on the mujahedeen fronts (Zaeef, 2010, chapter 3).

issued indicates how important it was to the movement. See, for example, his May 1997 order "against extravagant spending on parties":

> *"Expensive and needless parties are given in the Islamic Emirate, which by itself is extravagant and unlawful according to the Sharia."*[287]

Even travelling abroad, when it might be expected that officials would relax this austerity to enjoy the comforts of wherever they were, they retained it almost as a badge of identity:

> *"Each held up a briefcase for me to see. They explained that it was an understanding among the members of the Taliban that wherever they go, they take only one briefcase per person which contained a couple of sets of Afghani clothes. Since their country was very poor, it showed others that they are not visiting for personal gain. "We come with one briefcase and we leave with one briefcase." Michael joked, "You must do a lot of washing." "Yes, we wash our own clothes," the official replied, not understanding that Michael was making a joke at his expense. I understood their display of solidarity and frugality, but thought it misplaced. Usually delegations wish to demonstrate to the world their strength and wealth. They looked as if their only asset was poverty."*[288]

This ideal of strength through austerity is one that can be found throughout the movement. At a higher level, the fight to avoid wasting the state's money (the *beit ul-maal*) was imposed on them on account of the few countries offering financial support, so they had to make do with less. However, it is a theme that is often stressed in public pronouncements and orders relating to finance and the economy. Indeed, the Taliban campaigned repeatedly against corruption and financial waste.

> *"It is a fact that in the past corrupt regimes, despite actions that were against the shari'a, one of the corrupt and illegal customs was the giving and taking of bribes in government offices and departments. This continued as a tradition and was accepted as a norm. Although the Taliban Islamic movement of Afghanistan from the time of coming to power have written to related government offices about this corrupt and anti-shari'a action and have tried to stop it, unfortunately it can still be heard that the taking and giving of bribes is still continuing in some of the government offices. The stopping of this illegal action is not just the specific job of the*

287. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 45.

288. Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2286-93.

Islamic government, but it is the shari'a obligation of all the Muslim people of the country to stop this by words of mouth and by their hands. Therefore, all the Muslim Afghans are informed if they come in the government offices face-to-face with bribe-givers or bribe-takers or get information about them, in Kabul they should inform the caretaker of the ministry of justice, respected Nuruddin Turabi, and in the provinces, their governors. By giving their private report to them and in this way taking their part in this Islamic duty, obviously they will be rewarded by God All Mighty and will also become of interest to the Islamic Emirate."[289]

This is clearly derived from their Islamic teaching, as well as the externally-imposed circumstances of being under international sanctions for much of their rule. The language used references terminology from Islamic finance and newspapers often cited stories from the days of the *rashidun* Caliphs about how they managed the state's wealth.[290]

(v) Ways of interacting / consulting

Pashtun cultural mores, along with the precedent of the *shari'a* and the example of the Prophet Mohammad as told through the *hadith* record, formed the framework for interaction between groups during the 1980s. All this gave the Talibs of the time a practical experience of negotiating and interacting among themselves (that helped cement inter-group ties), a sense of political expediency (when dealing with the Soviets for prisoner exchanges) as well as a confidence in securing what was best for their groups, even if that meant taking pragmatic decisions.

Groups interacted with each other over possible future operations, supplies, and generally to function more as a unitary force against their enemy. Akbar Agha describes, for example, how groups would haggle over the use of Soviet prisoners to secure the release of their fellow mujahedeen from prison.[291] He also details the use of councils to settle disputes between different groups, as well as the establishment of a country-wide shura following the departure of Soviet troops from the country.[292]

289. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 1997a.
290. Editorial team, 1998c.
291. Agha, 2014, 56-62.
292. Agha, 2014, 67-9, 84-8.

These behaviours set the scene for the movement's early successes 1994-5, and then for their manner of rule across the country. Consensus and deal-making were preferred over using force to impose their will; they recognised that the former was much longer-lasting and stable than the latter. At various points during the early years, too, announcements would be made that the country would be governed by something akin to those country-wide shuras. A meeting in June 1995, for example, attended by Mullah Mohammad Omar and various other senior figures concluded with the suggestion:

> *"to form a grand Islamic Shura for all the people of Afghanistan. All the participants liked the suggestions and it was decided that further necessary steps will be taken and ways and means will be considered for the formation of such a grand Islamic Shura. It was also suggested that all conflicts and rifts in the country should be resolved through peaceful negotiations between the involved parties. This suggestion was also liked and accepted and it was decided to take necessary steps to implement it."*[293]

(vi) External sponsorship

The 1980s were when many of the methods and specific links that facilitated external sponsorship were begun. The *jihad* against the Soviets was useful in establishing these mechanics, whether they be between individuals, groups abroad (donors in the Gulf, for instance), or external states like the United States or Pakistan. Of course, external sponsorship of the religious clergy was *de rigeur* throughout their history, but the 1980s transformed this into something more akin to business or something that they were doing full-time.

Note that the separation of funding and fighting networks during the 1980s was something that was replicated in the Taliban's government model. They gained a sense of how to raise money, and what kind of person was good at summoning the external funding. They also became wise to the machinations of the bigger external powers — their relationship with Pakistan, for instance, was sharpened over this issue — throughout this period. There were pre-existing clerical networks within Pakistan, but

293. Editorial team, 1995c.

their direct interactions with agents of the state made them wary of these bureaucracies. One can also speculate that this may have shaped some of how they started to think about how their own government might work best, too, but there is little evidence either way on this point. The main point to draw here is that the Taliban were adept in cultivating a variety of financial sources and that the broad directions of these remained consistent well into the 1990s.

(vii) Geographic roots

The 'taliban' mujahedeen who later came to found the Taliban movement were mostly located in a very specific area, a fertile triangle in Kandahar described above. When they founded their movement and as they started to take more territory, they retained Kandahar as a core of power. It was, of course, the area where they felt comfortable already, but it was more than that. The *jihad* gave them a sense that this was land that they had spilt blood trying to defend or at least to battle those encroaching on their territory. They moved onwards (towards the airport) towards the end of the 1980s, but it was this core territory to which they returned at a later date when the war was over. It was in this territory where Mullah Mohammad Omar established his madrassa during the early 1990s, and it was in this area where many of the leadership in the intermediate stage stayed during this early 1990s period. Newspapers tell of many visits made by Mullah Mohammad Omar to the area to found the construction of mosques or to attend *dastarbandi* or turban-tying graduation ceremonies for students.[294]

294. Interview, Kabul, April 2013.

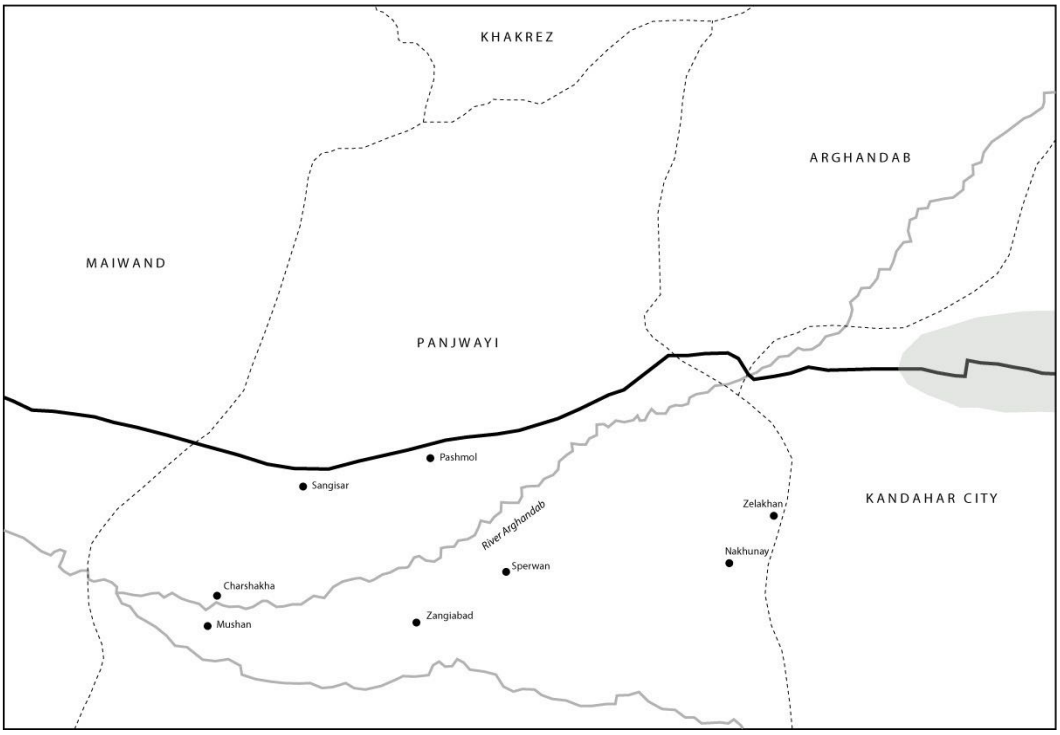

Figure 4: The core territory that saw 'taliban' fronts during the 1980s[295]

This strong pull back to a particular place can perhaps explain why certain habits and tendencies were harder than others to change once they had taken Kabul. The nostalgia for the intensity and purpose of their lives during the 1980s was sometimes hard to replicate amidst the bureaucracy of the late 1990s.

(viii) Military tactics

Finally, the 1980s gave those who fought in among the taliban *mujahedeen* a core repertoire of things they did when engaging in conflict. Some were inherited as general fighting behaviours retained among the tribes for decades, dating back to experience fighting against the British, for example. Others were taught — courses facilitated by the Pakistanis and Americans, for example, gave them exposure to the use of missiles and mortars.

295. This map was originally published in Zaeef, 2010, a book that I co-edited and thus drew the maps myself.

They were comfortable working with small groups, or at an individual level. The trench warfare of the 1980s as described in Gumnam's Kandahar Heroes (1996) or the guerrilla assassination actions described in Gumnam's earlier work, Kandahar Assassins (1986) can be read to represent the poles of the tactics they used.[296]

This worked mostly to their advantage, but when they moved into the north they confronted a style of fighting of which they had no experience and accordingly they were outmatched until they brought on allies and others who could supply that missing experience.[297]

The taliban fronts' emphasis on service and *shahadat* helped encourage leaders themselves to serve on the front lines — distinct from, say, the Gailanis or the Mujaddidis — and this was something that was encouraged later during the 1990s. In fact, Mufti Rasheed Ludhianvi's *Obedience to the Amir*, a key source text for understanding the Taliban during the 1990s, specifically encourages this.[298]

The 1980s, therefore, are very much the foundation for much of who the Taliban were, who they became and who they aspired to be. It is impossible to understand the 1990s government without appreciating the brotherhood of the trenches and the lessons they learnt during this time.

(b) Power and the logic of system choice

As the Taliban took more territory and assumed more responsibility for governing that territory, they were confronted with a problem as old as Afghanistan, that being how to rule the country and ensure that their influence is felt.

Several precedents were discussed and referenced. A tribal-centric model considered power as flowing primarily through Pashtun systems and institutions. There was the

296. Gumnam, 2014; Gumnam, 2016.

297. This was where the Haqqanis could help the Taliban movement, and also where at times the Arabs based in the country in the late 1990s also supplied additional experience.

298. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015, 65.

military-first model as practised by 'Abd ul-Rahman Khan, in which sheer force exercised throughout the country was the only way to ensure compliance from subjects. The Taliban brought several other models from their religious education, especially that of the Prophet Mohammad and the four *rashidun* successors.

As might be expected, the Taliban used parts of all of these. They were not revolutionary in terms of the systems they chose to impose and employ in their rule of the country, though they became more confident in choosing things outside the norm/default towards the late 1990s and early 2000s.

(i) What the Taliban inherited

The Taliban's core competencies that saw them gain widespread support early on were security and justice. Their central goals, as laid out in their first meetings and discussions, focused on ridding Greater Kandahar from the various rogue commanders and militia groups, establishing a monopoly on violence, providing security and addressing the growing anarchy.[299]

By taking Kabul in 1996, the Taliban captured not only the capital but also the state institutions. Much as they enforced social rules that governed much of rural southern Afghanistan, they transplanted rural informal governance structures into the weak state organs they attempted to reconstitute. Ministries were run like tribal shura meetings, with an open door policy. Individuals could walk into the office of the minister and present their issue in person. Multiple individuals described how the offices of ministers differed little from mud-hut rooms in southern Afghanistan, with rudimentary furniture and the minister surrounded by his aides and childhood friends.

While close to all appointees had little experience in the fields they were tasked with, there appeared to be a common approach amongst the Taliban.[300] After their

299. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 113-121.

300. This is a generalisation, of course. Anecdotal evidence, however, points towards a common approach.

appointment, ministers or heads of department would embark on a learning and fact-finding mission during which they met with technocrats, officials and others in order to learn about the challenges, rules and regulations that had governed the institution they were to run. One interviewee related the experience within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996:

> *"Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai talked to the people. He said: "We have no experience in the governance sphere and we only want honesty from everybody. If in the future I understand somebody used or misused our trust, I will meet with him and punish him." We weren't sure about the message of this ministry, but it was very interesting for me to watch, [having been employed there before the Taliban arrived]. In a very short time they understood everything about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They asked from everybody — I was one of the advisors — about the procedures of every department and every desk of political affairs.*[301]

It was not uncommon that much younger aides, with a secular education or more specific experience in the field, would be recruited. This was particularly common in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but could also be found amongst the circles in Kandahar.[302]

The approach the Taliban took to increase their level of expertise, and with it their effectiveness, should be taken into consideration when assessing their competence. Contrary to common wisdom, the Taliban, while mostly having only basic education and a basic knowledge of state affairs and the world, were nevertheless adaptable. This is to say that one should not confuse the lack of formal education or knowledge with the inability to learn, apply logic, or their general intelligence.

The Taliban understood the need for (self-)education, and many understood the lack of capacity amongst their own ranks specifically, and in Afghanistan in general. A case

301. Interview, Kabul, April 2013.

302. While one can find young individuals who had more experience or more educational background who helped to run policy for the Taliban, their weight varied considerably since their personal relationship to the person they were serving defined their effect on policy. Once again, there were considerable differences in approach where pragmatic politics stood in stark opposition to the central leadership's approach that was squarely based on principles without reference to the consequences, (or where they were willing to accept them, no matter how detrimental to their cause.)

in point is the re-opening of the Institute of Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996.

Much like Mullah Mohammad Omar, once they had consolidated their position within a ministry and started to take decisions, correction or changes became more difficult. A second detrimental factor that contributed to the ineffectiveness of many state institutions was the large and frequent turnover of staff. Ministers, deputies and other adjunct officials changed frequently.

(ii) The Taliban as an institution

Until the very end, the Emirate remained dominated by informal institutions, personalities and cultural traits, naturally-grown alliances based on family ties and shared experiences such as education and the 1980s *jihad*. This underlying reality created considerable confusion amongst international actors and often caused discontent and a view that the Taliban could not be trusted. After they reinstated the formal government in 1996, the opaque relationship between Kabul and the centre of power in the south amplified this perception.

The adaptation of formal state structures put considerable strain on the Taliban. They were caught between their desire to adequately address the needs of the growing territory under their control through state institutions, their ambition to run the country, and their conservative neo-fundamentalist mindset that regarded much of the new endeavours with great scepticism. While some embraced the new challenge and aimed to convert the movement into a government, the original power structure closely related to Mullah Mohammad Omar continued to exert unquestioned control.

The scale of the movement seems to have been limited by financial considerations rather than aspiration. Dorronsoro notes that a forty percent cut in staff in April 2000 was not so much because they were trying to trim the size of the state apparatus but rather because they could no longer afford to keep all their staff paid.[303]

303. Dorronsoro, 2005, 282.

(1) General conservatism and the lack of innovation

Despite the common adage that the Taliban were a revolutionary movement, a closer look at the governance structures they attempted to put in place shows much continuity as well. The Emirate's government echoed the government system of King Zahir Shah's era, the state apparatus of Burhanuddin Rabbani and even the Communist-era government.

Contemporary narratives of the King's government are nowadays tinged with romanticised nostalgia, but the country appears to have been in a greater state of equilibrium between trying to modernise and educate people, and taking care not to antagonise local sensitivities, in particular amongst the rural communities.[304] Key to this was the style of rule (and how power was exercised) — the further down you went, the more distant and standoffish the exercise of power seemed to get. In this way, Zahir Shah's governance structure intersected with local social structures, particularly among the Pashtun communities. While the Taliban adapted his system through the relative 'revolution' of their clerical system, much of their local governance displayed features of the King's system.[305]

The overall system, a cabinet with a Prime Minister, was lifted straight out of Zahir Shah's time. Underneath this surface view of their government, however, the difference was stark. The role of Mullah Mohammad Omar, the central shura and the informal structures in Kandahar superceded those of Kabul. Furthermore, the Taliban continued to forge what they held to be an Islamic state in the hope of ridding society at large of corruption and other 'moral degeneration.'

While they continued this transformative process, they tried to incrementally adjust the government system. Much of the institutions therefore remained the same, with

304. While this appeared to be the case, the King himself had an in-built bias toward the Pashtun population, and his rule does offer examples of uneven treatment of different communities throughout Afghanistan.

305. The Taliban's governance structures and rules were received unevenly and also enforced unevenly among different communities. This was in part the case on account of their view of the urban centres as places of moral decay that brought about the chaos and anarchy that had befallen Afghanistan, and partially due to the fact that their rule tended to interfere less in the rural communities of southern and eastern Afghanistan.

few changes in staffing beyond receiving a new minister. The Taliban encouraged technocrats and officials to return to their positions, and at times sought out individuals for their specific skill set, such as those who had been educated in the Soviet Union.[306]

While the Taliban introduced incremental changes to the law and the government in an effort to ensure compliance with *shari'a* law, much was in reaction to circumstances as they came up.[307] Their vision for the future, along with concrete plans of implementation, remained opaque even in September 2001.

The Taliban used the existing framework of governance as the basis for an Islamic state that would see a veneer of Islamic propriety applied to it. The evidence for what they sought to accomplish is inconclusive, arguably because they were never able to capture all of Afghanistan's territory and given the significant role that outside powers played.

By early 2001, the Taliban's lack of experience and overextension was evident, having ceded the responsibility to feed and supply basic health care to the drought-stricken poor to the United Nations and NGOs.

(2) The Taliban and other Afghan groups

With a rapidly growing administration and military force, the Taliban had to navigate different interests. Individuals like Jalaluddin Haqqani had only joined after intervention of non-Taliban outsiders and maintained an uneasy relationship with the centre of power in Kandahar.[308]

As outlined above, much like the Afghan government post-2001, the Taliban encouraged people to support and join, but did not accept organisations. This was a central feature of negotiations with other groups within Afghanistan. The political

306. This was particularly true of the military field: they aimed to rehabilitate the airforce and did so with the help, often under extreme pressure, of officials from the Communist era.

307. The changes the Taliban introduced, such as the consolidation of ministries, seem to be at least partially born out of necessity to curb spending.

308. Haqqani would remain marginalised, partially due to his early rejection of the movement. Another line of argument suggests that he lacked a relationship with Mullah Mohammad Omar and other senior members in Kandahar.

wing of *Hizb-e Islami* reached out to the Taliban early on, as did others, to form an alliance; they sent a delegation to Kandahar. The talks concluded without result.

The Taliban suggested that individuals could join, but that they were not ready to form an alliance. Their behaviour differed little from on group to the next, even if a previous relationship existed with a mujahideen faction. A large number of *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami* commanders joined the Taliban, in some cases with their respective network of fighters; this meant they were able to keep their light weapons, as was the case with a number of groups in eastern Afghanistan.

> *"The Islamic Emirate had indirectly sought to invite the Northern Alliance to a deal: 'You should all surrender your weapons. Maybe we will give a post to Ahmed Shah Massoud as the governor of a province, but you should first join as part of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and lay your weapons down.' This was rejected. They didn't want to hand over their weapons. This was the main difference. Our Mullahs and political mullahs had categorised them as 'rebels'. The Islamic shari'a states that the funeral ceremony of a 'rebel' is invalid and that you shouldn't pray for them. They are like non-Muslims. This was the Islamic shari'a law. Our political cadre tried to convince the big leaders [in Kandahar] that we should make a deal and get them to join up with us. So there were two main schools of thought on this among the Taliban at the time. I wasn't present myself, but I heard about a meeting between Mullah Mohammad Rabbani and Mullah Mohammad Omar. Rabbani told Omar: "what if we just let Massoud stay in his province? Give it to him and he will keep good security in the area. He was a good mujahid. What do you think about this? Let's not continue fighting with him, because we have lost many people." Mullah Mohammad Omar rejected this. "No," he said. "If we let him stay there, then it means we are also letting the support of Iran, France and other countries to continue. They are bringing weapons, bullets, shells, money and all sorts of other things. Each day they are becoming more powerful. This is like a disease. At some point it will explode and create an even bigger problem for us. So first of all I want a completely united Afghanistan and afterwards we will speak with them, give them jobs and power."*[309]

This policy was informed by the behaviour of the mujahideen groups during the civil war of the 1990s. The Taliban had started their movement in opposition to the chaos the former mujahideen had created throughout the country and wanted to ensure that the public understood that it was to depose those who had caused the chaos, while not excluding any one particular group or individuals on the basis of their former affiliation.

309. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

In some ways, the Taliban were moving against the example of the mujahedeen government(s) as much as they were trying to create something new. It is an important case of 'oppositional identity', where their sense of self was defined more by who they had decided they didn't want to be.

(3) Pragmatists and principalists

We now know, though there were hints at the time, that within the Taliban there were also several groupings that had different visions of what the movement should be trying to accomplish. There was thus a tension between those who wanted the Taliban to succeed and work as a movement on the international stage versus those who wanted to ensure that the movement was unique and standing tall as a moral force in the world and who wanted to make sure that it was a movement 'for God'. In the end, there was no way for these forces to reconcile, except perhaps with the passage of time in the same way as it has been possible to observe (to some extent) in Iran from the days of the revolution until the present day. The Taliban were often two-faced in the actions that they took. This was in part a result of the different forces working on the movement and the variety of forces they sought to please.[310]

(4) Mullah Mohammad Omar

The function and role that Mullah Mohammad Omar has played within the Taliban movement since 1994 have been pivotal. His exceptional charisma in the southern rural Pashtun context was often lost on outsiders. Even though he fought during the 1980s *jihad* as a small commander for *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami*, he never held any senior positions. During the civil war of the early 1990s, he was not involved with any

310. There were, of course, also regional differences among the Ulemaa' represented in senior tiers. Dorronsoro's characterisation of the movement as "coherent [but not] monolithic" stems from an analysis that saw three broad groupings: the loy Kandahar mullahs directly "aware of Mullah Mohammad Omar"; the Ulemaa of Ghazni and Lowgar close to the Mujaddidi family; and the Ulemaa in the east of the country (for example, those surrounding Jalaluddin Haqqani) (Dorronsoro, 2005, 275).

of the warring factions, which is often argued to be one of the reasons, besides his general character, why he was chosen as leader.

As a former member of the Taliban Foreign Affairs Ministry stated, "Sometimes for important cases I would call the office of Mullah Mohammad Omar because the main decision authority of our government was located there. Especially in the case of the Bamiyan statues, we had to try to convince the people in Kandahar. We made great efforts, as well as on the matter of Chechen recognition which we tried to ensure that he not offer official recognition."[311]

Before taking a decision, Mullah Mohammad Omar would commonly consult with others and enquire about their opinions. This is mentioned by individuals that worked closely with him. Decisions, however, were final. At times — particularly towards the end of the Taliban's rule — he ignored opinions that were voiced by other senior members. As some interlocutors related, other senior members would try to prevent him from taking a decision in order to gain more time to influence it.

> *"At the beginning, we tried to ensure that he didn't take this or that decision, but sometimes things are planned in a way that they become beyond one's ability."*[312]

Outspoken dissent, however, was rare. This was the result of the understanding that only certain ways of engagement had a chance of success. This was also a by-product of how the movement was initially formed, where loyalty and obedience were key values held and adhered to by all.

The leadership in general was shaped by its strong loyalty to Mullah Mohammad Omar. There were and are, however, two distinct sets of actors to be found amongst the senior leadership. While some had their own support networks of followers — military commanders, for example — and who therefore had more independence, others were chosen by Mullah Mohammad Omar for a specific task. Their power rested with him; if for whatever reason they lost his trust, their status would erode along with his view

311. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

312. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

of them. Relationships were not static, and subject to change. While Mullah Mohammad Omar commanded great loyalty, much of the 'system' saw individuals taking unilateral action.

Mullah Mohammad Omar's biggest concern when he was first approached to take a leading role in the new group was the durability and cohesiveness of the group.[313]

The oath or *bayat* was introduced to ensure he would not be deserted. It was one of the central practices for leaders when joining the Taliban, to swear allegiance to Mullah Mohammad Omar. During the evolution of the movement dissent — by openly voicing a different opinion or disobeying a decision taken by Mullah Mohammad Omar — was considered a breach of the oath. This internal dynamic was particularly important when it came to international relations and negotiations.

At the time of the movement's founding, Mullah Mohammad Omar was 32 years old and had not completed his religious education, a fact he was keenly aware of. He did not possess the requisite religious authority, and he openly sought the support of the Ulemaa' to support him and his decisions.

The resulting uncertainty as to his credentials would cause Mullah Mohammad Omar to make certain that his decisions adhered to what he and his advisors would conceive of as being utmost compliance with Islam. As we will explore in later sections, the need to over-assert pureness did dominate large factions of the Taliban and fundamentally influenced their decisions.[314]

For Mullah Mohammad Omar this remained true even after his assumption of the title *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*; in fact, it became more pronounced as the emphasis on the need to follow the example of the Prophet Mohammad and his own tendency towards consultation increased.

It was not only Mullah Mohammad Omar who seemed to have a sense of inferiority but others within the senior leadership. Those in charge of the fledgeling government were acutely aware of their lack of experience and of their lack of worldliness. This

313. See Zaeef, 2010. Also, interviews (2008-2011).

314. Note that the first two or three years of the Taliban's activities saw them frequently referred to by their rivals as being 'agents of America', something they actively sought to speak out against.

sometimes was manifested in a stronger adherence to principles they knew and had established in their education or upbringing at the expense of give-and-take pragmatism. Many felt that the Taliban government didn't have friends; even with their chief supporter, Pakistan, there were tensions and they weren't able to rely on them for advice and support.

The senior leadership's inexperience and sense of inferiority occasionally expressed itself in a sort of 'spoilt child syndrome', in which they would be perfectly content to destroy all their achievements on a particular issue over a technicality or perceived affront when they didn't get what they wanted. This does not appear to have been common, and it seems most were aware that it was a counter-productive trait.

By the end of their rule, in late 2001, these characteristics combined together to create a movement and a leadership that was thinking emotionally about the situation that confronted them:

> *"Lack of confidence was one of the big problems for the Taliban. The Taliban government, especially their leadership, believed that the United States wanted to end their government. They thought that 'even if we surrender and hand bin Laden over, and if we accept all their requests, they will still not allow the Taliban government to continue. So why should we defame ourselves and the prestige of the people of Afghanistan. […] But if we hand over bin Laden and give in to their demands and they still collapse our government, then we will have a double shame."*[315]

Mullah Mohammad Omar, along with the majority of Taliban, regarded their core constituency as being the rural communities of Afghanistan, which they primarily identified as being located in the south and east amongst the Pashtun population.[316]

315. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

316. They regarded the rural population in general as their constituency, based on the idea of the cities that were believed to bring corruption and immoral values. The preference or reference to the Pashtun communities should not be regarded as a policy choice, but rather as something they tried to avoid. They were unable to escape their own upbringing, education and history, however.

This might go some way to explaining a position taken during an interview conducted in September 1996.[317] He stated that he believed amputation was preferable to imprisonment:

> *"Sharia law is unequivocal on this point: the amputation is a just punishment. Islam is opposed to the imprisonment of offenders. In our religion, the deprivation of liberty is in itself a form of injustice. Cast a man in prison is to deprive his family of his livelihood. A man cut a finger or an arm, however, has paid his debt to society and can immediately return to work to feed his family."*

He continued by describing the different types of sanctions that Islam offers:

> *"Islam recognizes two types of sanctions: financial and physical. People who have committed an offense or a crime to pay a fine - or money. or in kind - to all those who have suffered the consequences of their actions. So much for the penalty. As for corporal punishment, they range from beheading. for murder, stoning to death for women guilty of adultery. Some packages are worth their authors to be beaten with a cane. Amputation is a form of corporal punishment among others. We will still not spend the money of our citizens to build prisons to keep people locked up!"*[318]

Beyond Afghanistan, Mullah Mohammad Omar and much of the leadership regarded the wider *umma* as their audience. Their decisions, and how they were regarded and commented on by the west, in particular by the United States of America towards the end of the 1990s, were filtered through how this would be perceived by their home constituency and the wider umma in turn. The experiment of a "true Islamic State" was more than just empty words for the leadership.

Above all, Mullah Mohammad Omar sought to manage perceptions within the Islamic world. This was partly related to the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* title that he took in April 1996, but in general the Taliban had a very pronounced sense that what they were doing (in establishing an Islamic state along with a government with the shari'a at its

317. Torabi, 1996.

318. Torabi, 1996.

core) could serve as example for the rest of the Islamic world. See, for example, remarks he made in 1996:

> *"the Western world, as a civilization, already embarked on a path of decline and death. The Occidental takes [man] for the center of the universe and claims that he did not need God. He draws his arrogance that he believes is his material success. His arrogance is, basically, an avatar of Satanism. Unfortunately, much of our elites have been infected by these diseases that are Western arrogance, atheism, materialism and disregard for morality. We must purify our Muslim societies before we worry about the rest of the world to divert it from the path of Satan and make him look the truth in the face. The most significant event of the present time is not the invention of the computer or other machines equally absurd, but the revival of Islam and its mission - to save the world Jahiliyah [ignorance] and civilized humanity which is returned to the wild."*[319]

This comes up frequently in recollections by those that knew him and who were active in the circles around him. The desire for posterity and the sense that behaviour must be exemplary was a prominent consideration. This is important in helping explain his behaviour and that of others close to him on issues of principle that came up during negotiations.

(5) The Prophetic model

Mullah Mohammad Omar, as leader of the Taliban movement, took care to be seen to be following the prophetic model as handed down since the time of Mohammad. Michael Cook described three features of the early caliphate and its political culture in *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective* (2014).[320] It is not hard to find examples of Mullah Mohammad Omar taking care to be conspicuous in his following of each:

319. Torabi, 1996.

320. Cook, 2014.

1) *"First the ethos [...] is strongly antithetical to patrimonialism — to the kind of political culture in which the king regards his kingdom as his property and lives off the fat of the land. One respect in which this is manifest is the initial absence of hereditary succession…"*

2) *"The second feature is the rejection of despotism. One manifestation of this is a conspicuously reciprocal conception of the fact that gives rise to political allegiance (bay'a)."*

3) *"The third feature is a strong commitment to the rule of law, typically identified with the Book of God and the practice (Sunna) of his Prophet — in other words, the Shari'a."*[321]

The lack of pomp was indeed a characteristic of the Taliban's rule and Mullah Mohammad Omar's place in that government. Visitors to the leadership in Kandahar were stunned at the spartan conditions.[322] The pledge of allegiance and structures of power was something that senior circles in the Taliban took extremely seriously — arguably it was one of their chief concerns. Moreover, the need to be seen to follow the *shari'a* (leaving aside the question of what exactly that meant for now) was also paramount for Mullah Mohammad Omar, leading him to seek advice and religious guidance from scholars in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

(6) 'Obedience to the Amir': the Islamic model

It is instructive to examine a document written by a prominent Pakistani cleric, Mawlawi Rasheed Ludhianvi, entitled *Obedience to the Amir*, to learn about the model that Mullah Mohammad Omar was known to have mentioned and endorsed.[323] It is unclear exactly when the text was written, but it was probably in 1998 or 1999. Ludhianvi had visited the Taliban movement and Mullah Mohammad Omar inside Afghanistan and came away with extremely positive impressions. He wrote his short text (in Urdu) primarily as advice for members of the Taliban movement and Mullah Mohammad Omar is known to have passed out Dari and Pashto translations of the

321. Cook, 2014, 318-319.

322. UN internal correspondence and documents, author's copy.

323. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015.

book to visitors, saying that this is what they should read in order to understand the Taliban.[324]

The text is divided into eight sections and is more a series of proscriptions rather than prescriptions. This format is something that was mirrored in the 2006 version of the *layeha* or 'rules' (and subsequent versions), clearly modelled on Ludhianvi's short book.[325] This is not a text where ideology or doctrine is mentioned much. This is a functional guide to the management of the organisational identity of the movement. The key theme or goal to which Ludhianvi guides the reader and encourages is unity. This, he argues, is the key way that the Taliban can distinguish themselves from the mujahedeen groups:

> *"If those to whom the Taliban's sacred movement is entrusted do not learn a lesson from the fate of the previous people, then listen: their fate will be no different from the fate of the previous people, rather it will be worse than their fate. From those people's differences only the section of jihad was affected. But if the Taliban fall prey to differences it will bring a bad name to the whole of Islam. Islamic affairs and the sacredness of God's name and his system will be trodden underfoot."*[326]

This principle of unity is emphasised throughout the book. The various precepts and advice that Ludhianvi offers all return to the need to keep control of the movement and to concentrate power in the figure of the *Amir*, Mullah Mohammad Omar. Section two focuses on this point and included citations of (and commentary on) forty hadiths that justify the need to obey the *Amir*. The final three sections (six, seven and eight) relate to advice, how the *Amir* should seek counsel, and how those giving advice should in turn behave.

As a model, Ludhianvi's advice was manifest in how power was constructed by those in leadership circles. Chapter five will explore some of the precise mechanisms which saw these processes put into place, as well as the implications of this such as the Kabul-Kandahar rivalry.

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324. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015, 19.

325. Dickey, 2006; Johnson and Dupee, 2012.

326. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015, 41.

(iii) Social Change

It is worth taking a moment for an interim assessment of some of the main ways that the Taliban affected political and social change at this stage of analysis. Arguably, the Taliban's innovations (and inheritance) on the political level was what made it stand out from other groups. There had been other mujahedeen groups in power in the past, as had there been those outside the monarchical system. The Taliban came with several new elements, however, quite apart from what they chose to do with those elements during their rule.

Firstly, they were from the countryside and the provinces. This was not an urban movement, but one where the values and customs of the village stood sway. The fact of an urban-rural divide was not new (see above) but the transplantation of village values and society into the cities was a departure from past experience. These were different worlds, driven apart as much by suspicion and rumour as more measurable structural differences like education levels or income. One interviewee mentioned how he was driving near the airport during the years of Taliban rule in Kabul.[327] He met a Talib soldier from Uruzgan on the road and offered him a lift. The Talib refused because his father had told him not to spend a single night in Kabul because "so many sins are committed there at night", so he was trying to leave the city before it got dark.

The Taliban movement post-1994 also represented a clerical revolution. There is a compelling case to be made for this in that the *Ulemaa*', for many years deprived of any real status or power within society, emerge from the maelstrom of the 1980s war with a slightly higher standing, particularly in certain places. These had been some of the first to stand up to the Soviets and to the Afghan Communist government and they had experienced at least as much suffering as many other groups during the period, especially on account of the disappearance of large numbers of scholars. So they emerged without much fanfare at the end of the war, looking to the mujahedeen parties in Kabul to bring the 'Islamic government' for which they so longed. But slowly those dreams did not come to pass and eventually in 1994 they took action on their

327. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

own, increasingly bolstered by a confidence borne about by their initial successes. They had been minimal figures previously, with only a small role in the villages (for the most part). Tribal leaders were marginalised over the course of the 1980s war, particularly in southern Afghanistan where they had had a much less central role to start with (when compared to the east). By 1994, the assertion of leadership by the religious students and their teachers — members of the 'taliban' fronts — happened in the absence of alternatives, since the various other forms of religious leadership had all left the country by this point. Their new powers were a mix of weapons, a solidarity network, a message and clear goal, the sense that they had morality on their side and a general confidence coupled with the institution of the courts.

This was another part of the revolution of values that took place in Afghanistan's urban spaces, where the customs and traditions of the village came up against those of the city, of the progressive elites. They brought a socially all-embracing vision — "the *shari'a*" — which meant different things to different people but was difficult for many to argue against, especially in view of the improvements to security in areas under their control. They were an expression of a process that had been initiated in the late 1970s, one in which new social arrangements were forged and that saw the religious clergy increase their power and influence. Within the religious networks of students, it made sense that they would support the system that had educated and moulded them in a more significant manner than any other institution. To some extent, it was also able to guarantee a future and employment (informal or formal) so it is no surprise that there was support for this turn of events within those networks of students, teachers and scholars.

The Taliban also represented a kind of youth revolution. Note the name of the group: not "Ulemaa," or scholars, but "Taliban," the students. This was a youth movement. Its leadership was young in 1994, and arguably their lack of experience was a key factor in their (mis-)management of certain decisions. This was a movement whose members still needed tuition and mentorship, a fact that many outside parties sought to contribute to for their own purposes. Note, too, what many of the senior leadership did post-2001. A significant number went back to school, in effect. Some were in Guantánamo and continued their religious studies there, or completed their

memorisation of the Qur'an. In this way we can see that they sought out the chance to become *bona fide* religious scholars that they had dreamed of since adolescence but that they had never achieved because the business of running a government got in the way.

Others have made the claim that the Taliban represent a tribal revolution as well.[328] It is hard to separate cause and effect here. We can note an increase in certain tribal groupings in certain sectors of the leadership and key positions, but the extent to which this was a conscious choice or product of circumstances and the context of the time is unclear. As somewhat disenfranchised parts of society, the scholars brought various new strands of society into the leadership, but it is the contention of this author that the reasons for this should be traced back to the social context of the leadership (dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, if not earlier) rather than specific innovations during the 1990s.

The precedent of previous governments and groups was a strong influence for the Taliban. In the early years, there was often little they could do outside following how others had behaved before them. In this, there was some conservatism and a pragmatic realisation that they could not hold power *and* change the basic paradigms of power in the Afghan state at the same time. Their approach to governance in this way was not revolutionary. Their overall inclinations were strongly nationalist. They didn't seek to split up the country. They believed in the idea of Afghanistan and its traditions and its identity as forged by various peoples. Of course, their flavour of nationalism was Pashtun-centric and this meant certain beliefs as to the historical and current role of Pashtuns.

There were some revolutionary social features and, later on, some attempts at innovation in the way governance functioned. The extent to which they were driven into these innovations by contexts like their minimal resources will be explored in the next chapter. Many of their social innovations seemed revolutionary in the cities, but this was in part a consequence of the Taliban's attempt to bring village values and

328. Chayes, 2007; Johnson and Mason, 2007.

social norms into the urban space. They were offering an untested promise of 'justice', one that turned out to be just as complicated as the attempts of those that had tried similar experiments before them.

Part II: Mechanisms, Choices and Outcomes

"All identities, without exception, have been socially constructed"[329]

Inherited factors were, as we have seen, important parts of the Taliban's identity. These precedents gave them a baseline from which they could then take action and craft policy. The process was far more fluid than many previous accounts of the 1990s government have claimed, and particularly those that have contributed to the popular imagination.

The second half of this dissertation outlines how policy was created within the Taliban movement. Not having been personally present in the meetings at the time, this must necessarily be constructed from retrospective recollections, memoirs, interviews and assumed from various then-contemporary news reports. These sources are not ideal, but it is the best that we have. Policy generation is hereby seen as something that individuals and groups create. It is the product of discussion and decision. The traces of this process are still distinguishable, though in some scenarios there have been attempts to obscure the calculus and reasoning that went into each particular decision. Policy is seen here as both the strategic aspirations that were sometimes expressed publicly, and the actions on the ground around the country that (often, but not always) constituted the expression of these intentions. Policy, therefore, constitutes the 'meat' of choices being made in senior leadership circles during the years they were in power as well as how those choices were then manifest in the cities and provinces under Taliban control.

The four chapters of this section distinguish between internal and external mechanisms. In this way, I identify a difference between types of decisions and debates that happened within the movement as a result of ideological or aspirational processes and that which came about as a result of encounters with other groups and ideas external to the core leadership circles. These external encounters could take the form of other groups within Afghanistan — Massoud's forces and what he represented in northern Afghanistan, for example — or external powers like the United States or the United Nations, or a smaller organisation like the N.G.O. CARE. Note that internal is

329. Scott, 2010, xii.

taken here to mean things that were already part of their inherited identity, especially given that arguably most ideas were, at one point or another, external to the individual.

We have already seen how policy functioned on multiple levels at once within the Taliban administration. There was, particularly following the taking of Kabul in 1996, a foreign policy which attempted to situate the movement on the international stage, and which sought to claim the apparatus of the Afghan state on this international level and for their representatives to act as peers in a domain like the United Nations, for example. There was a domestic and national level, in which the Taliban's two leadership poles of Kabul and Kandahar sought to drive the country forward in a multitude of directions, be they economic, socio-cultural and/or political. I will spend proportionately more time examining this level since it is where the majority of elite-level machination took place. There was also a micro-version of the domestic level, which we might term 'local' administration, where decisions made at the foreign or national levels did not necessarily apply and where policies were often created without the official approval of higher levels. In this way, for example, provincial officials in the south and south-east of the country were able to make agreements with NGO officials to provide education for girls that sometimes contravened national policies in place at the time.

Different policies could coexist under the same Emirate, often without discord developing. It was only when the lens of the media or some other external intervention highlighted this dissonance that efforts would be made to reconcile the differences between the different levels of policy, albeit half-heartedly implemented. The Taliban government was, for the majority of its rule, too resource-poor to be able to unilaterally implement policy derived from religious ideology, for example. In a similar way, whatever the senior elites thought about the vices of narcotic usage, they were unable to avoid the intersection and de facto cooperation with narcotics trafficking networks during their period of rule for similar reasons.

For this dissertation, internal mechanisms can be separated into three broad categories: moral drive, Taliban internal politicking, and improvisation/chance. Through a variety of specific mechanisms, the Taliban were active in their efforts to shape policy on the national and international levels. In the beginning, they were

forced to improvise the precise way they did this, forming ad hoc discussion groups and panels of senior clerics and respected individuals to offer counsel and to brainstorm options. Later on, once they had inherited/conquered much of the machinery of the rump Afghan state, along with all its employees, they found other more formal venues and techniques for accomplishing the same. The core leadership circles, however, never stopped their informal processes for generating and offering counsel, particularly as Kandahar functioned very differently from Kabul as a power centre in this respect.

External mechanisms were important for the Taliban in that certain stimuli gave the movement impetus to take certain decisions which in turn added to the accretion of ideological and cultural history surrounding the movement as a leadership force. In this way, for example, the international pressure and media furore over the decision of what to do with the Buddha statues in Bamiyan turned the issues from something that Mullah Mohammad Omar considered uncontroversial and very much a side-issue into a new and active part of how he conceived the Taliban. The inexperience and the frequent need to improvise was, we shall see below, a key driver of policy change and helped cement identity, often in ways contrary to what external drivers sought.

Some have argued that external influence (and the resulting mechanisms) was an essential part to how the Taliban must be assessed. In particular, the role of Pakistan as a primary founder, creator and influencer of the movement is much vaunted.[330] In a similar way, bin Laden and those associated with him are claimed to have "hijacked" the movement.[331] We shall see below how these external interventions were important to generating policy, but quite often in unintended or unanticipated directions. Given that external interventions came in two forms — people and ideas — there was a good deal of variation in the specifics of how these changes were manifest.

Overall, the picture that emerges is clear, even if the precise intentions behind certain decisions are sometimes opaque. Ultimately, the unanticipated — from the perspective of the Afghan Taliban — milestone of al-Qaida's attacks on the United States in

330. Davis, 2001; Rashid, 1998.

331. Gutman, 2008.

September 2001 curtailed processes that were underway. For many aspects of the Taliban's state-building project we are forced into the realm of speculation as to what might have been when we attempt to assess the particularities of their rule.

5. Mechanisms I — Internal

This chapter examines the processes and decisions taken within the Taliban's senior leadership structures to plan and implement policy. The factors explored in chapters two to four are — because they shaped and formed the Taliban's identity before they took power — a key part of the raw materials that the Taliban employed. Religious and cultural factors — both ideology and practice — were a prominent means by which the Taliban sought to publicly justify policy change, even if there were sometimes other factors at play beneath the surface. Similarly, the political inheritance was important in shaping the kinds of tactics that the senior leadership employed, albeit one they sought to transcend. A third and final aspect of the Taliban's internal mechanisms is often given short shrift in the literature thus far, but I will show how improvisation and chance were tremendously important for generating policy on a small-scale as well as on a strategic level, however unintentionally this may have been.

Following a thematic exposition of the various mechanisms, I look at some specific cases that can help practically illustrate what took place. These mini case-studies will examine areas from the precise exercise of power and the structures of government to religious and judicial reform, cultural and education policy.

(a) Moral drive

"The Taliban legislate for utopia."

United Nations cable, September 26, 2001[332]

The firm desire for a government that could be seen to be moral was key to several key members of the Taliban's senior leadership tier from the very beginning. It seems to have been more than just a slogan repeated at every public meeting; Mullah Mohammad Omar and those around him were not cynical or ungenuine about their

332. Vendrell, 2001, 18.

efforts to provide efficient and just government for those under their rule. Indeed, the moral dimension of their project was strong from the outset and featured in internal and public discussions. This stemmed, perhaps, from the moral exceptionalism that was part of their sense of identity from the beginning; as was discussed in chapter four, they saw themselves as the unique group that would end corruption and moral decay endemic in places like Kandahar and Kabul.[333]

A key question that must figure in any deep discussion of the Taliban movement's approach is to ask which came first, ideology or power games and realpolitik. Versions of Taliban history tend to emphasise ideology, in part because it is what lies on the surface. Images of televisions and cassette tape 'hung' in the streets of Kabul are common visual tropes used to represent the movement.

In some ways, the moral drive was a core aspect of how the senior leadership approached their rule and the world around them. We have already seen how, to some extent, the Taliban represented an encroachment of village values and practices on the urban areas of Afghanistan. Note that this had already been steadily happening independently of the Taliban; the disruptions of the 1980s conflict saw many communities move to cities, towns and/or refugee camps in which they were mixed with groups not associated with their original village communities.[334] A recent memory of the competition between the urban and rural spheres could be drawn from life since the 1960s and 1970s, even, when the state (read: urban values) attempted to encroach on the village domain and systems of authority (within which the local Mullah, if present, would have been included) in the name of education.[335] We have also already seen how many within the Taliban rank-and-file saw cities as emblems of corruption and moral decay. They sought to bring a purer system to cleanse the city of this urban decadence.[336]

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333. Note that the US state dept also made a similar judgement call in the early days of the movement (Gutman, 2008, 74-79).

334. Ruttig, 2012, 109.

335. Giustozzi, 2010, 5.

336. This is an argument also made by Buruma and Margalit, 2005, 44-45, but also the entire chapter entitled "The Occidental City."

We can chart the presence of this moral drive in the Taliban's expanding and shifting goals (as publicly expressed) over the period of their rule. In 1994, the emphasis was on removing 'anarchism' from Kandahar. As such, the kinds of policies being discussed were specifically geared to this end. Attempts were made to clamp down on crime and banditry in the greater Kandahar area. This did not require policy development or innovation: this was already firmly part of the justice-first toolkit that they brought as religious scholars and judges.

By 1995, their limited aim had expanded to "implement the *shari'a*" with a question-mark as to whether this would be something they sought to do countrywide or just in their core southern base. A representative example of this is a statement by Mullah Mohammad Omar in May 1995:

> *"It is time to start their Jihad. it is time that they make all kinds of sacrifices for the protection of the Islamic faith. […] We asked the religious scholars for their advice and received a sharia based decree from them. In the light of this decree from our religious scholars we started our armed resistance to the corrupt regime in Kabul. We started this movement for the protection of the faith and the implementation of the sharia law and the safeguard of our sovereignty. We started this movement in order to rescue our people from the crisis they were facing and to bring a long lasting peace and security to this country. The Afghan nation knows us. They know we are their brothers who stood by them in their Jihad."*[337]

In this way, the Taliban are framed as a defensive movement, one formed out of the actions of others rather than because of any desires for power they may have had.

By 1997, this message had expanded a little further to "eliminate disorder" and to bring peace countrywide. Kabul had fallen to the Taliban in 1996 and their national aspirations had crystallised. Here is a statement from the "caretaker shura" in November 1997:

> *"In order to get rid of such disorder, the ingratiated Taliban shed their sacred blood and sacrificed themselves so that the holy Shari'a can be implemented in official and unofficial affairs of the country. The aim of all the leaders of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was not to spare any efforts in the way of eliminate corruption, disorder and other mishaps."*[338]

337. Omar, 1995.

Only two years later, statements include more talk of "consolidation" and national government:

> *"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan relies on the principle of fraternity, cooperation, jihad and fight against moral corruption and lack of security in order to develop and consolidate the Islamic system and realise the aspirations of the martyrs and the pious people of Afghanistan. It believes that this policy is based on the historical and national traditions, objective conditions and needs of the broad masses of the Muslim nation of Afghanistan."*[339]

We should be cautious of how goals are analysed concerning the Taliban movement, however, especially in the light of Roy's anti-teleological comments:

> *"But the literature of jihad places less emphasis on the objective (to create an Islamic state) than on the mystical dimension (to sacrifice one's life); it is the act of supreme devotion. […] At the same time, devotion is opposed to organization: martyrdom has more meaning than victory. There is no "obligation to produce a result" in jihad: it is an affair between the believer and God and not between the mujahid and his enemy."*[340]

An article written by Mullah Amir Khan in May 1995 offers an illustration of this. Entitled "what did a martyred Talib want?", the author begins by describing the Talib's love of study and books, and the sacrifices he made in order to receive a full Islamic education. He then questions why the Talib left his study and his family:

> *"…why did all this happen? He didn't want any position or money or power. […] It is clear that the Talib died for the sake of the Koran. He sacrificed his life in the way of Allah. The Talib died for the protection of the faith and the implementation of the Islamic system in this land. He was martyred for the love of shari'a in his heart. He died in the way of protecting the property and dignity of his Muslim brothers and sisters. He died because he wanted to rescue the oppressed from the tyrants. He died because he wanted to rid his nation of thugs and looters. The Talib died for the protection and honour of his Islamic faith."*[341]

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338. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 1997b.

339. Editorial team, 1999y.

340. Roy, 1994, 65-66.

341. Unknown, 1995b.

It should come as no surprise that the Taliban movement sought to implement their moral desires through the instrument of the law and various associated institutions. They were clerics and law professors (or aspiring to be such) and the law was, therefore, the tool with which they had most familiarity and believed to be most suited to their purposes. The number and specificity of the kinds of laws they were issuing is an indication of the worth with which they held it, though the fact that laws were often reissued reminds us that their problem was implementation of those laws, not coming up with them in the first place. A decree by Mullah Mohammad Omar issued on December 3, 1995, for example, "on the prohibition of shaving and cutting the beard", was followed by a subsequent decree issued on December 24, 1996, with the same title.[342]

This returns us to the quotation from a UN internal briefing that began this section. The Taliban were, indeed, legislating for utopia. If a problem existed, legislation was a preferred solution. Even though, as we shall see below, internal non-public efforts were also made to solve problems between ministries or institutions, the collections of laws issued by the Taliban are filled with small expressions of such issues. December 1998, for example, saw the issuing of a decree "on the better discharge of the duties of the *Amr bil Marouf* department in the districts".[343] In March 1999, Mullah Mohammad Omar issued a decree "on wearing the turban", but this was later followed by another separate decree "on fastening the turban in accordance with the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad".[344] By July 2001, famously, a decree was even issued which forbade the import of a number of "non-Shari'a items" which included "centipedes", "lobsters (a kind of sea animal)" and "Christmas cards".[345] The legal tendency among

342. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 38 and 43.

343. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 50.

344. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 51 and 54.

345. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 81. Talibs interviewed in recent years note that not all of these restrictions were as arbitrary as it may first seem: "fireworks (for children)", for example, had caused some accidents in the months leading up to the law so they were added to the list. The legislation for the *Amr bil Marouf* ministry further explains: "The personnel for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice shall explain to the public the harm of kites [and kite flying] such as wasteful spending, death, deprivation of education, and looking into others' houses, etc" (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 3).

the senior scholars and legal professionals seemed to believe that if somehow they were able to draft enough legislation, society would finally be reformed and live up to their conception of what an Islamic life and Islamic society should look like.

Olivier Roy, writing before the 1994 emergence of the Taliban movement, noted that the decade and a half of clerical rule in Iran revealed the "failure" of political Islam in the following paradox:

> *"How can one escape the cycle: no Islamic state without virtuous Muslims, no virtuous Muslims without an Islamic state? This is the function of the party: a training site for the pure, a synthesis between a political actor and a moral instructor, the party functions more as a sect than as an instrument for obtaining power."*[346]

Or, as he asked earlier in his book, "if everyone is virtuous, why should institutions be necessary?"[347] This is a question about which the Taliban never managed to reach a conclusive position. Arguably there were those within the movement who had a more grounded vision of the future political and social development of their government, but their influence was slight and the opportunity for any change (gradual or otherwise) was cut short in September 2001.

Note the following as an example of this belief that moral change was essential to the wider reform agenda of the movement:

> *"Reformation was seen as the movement's greatest obligation and goal. The Taliban introduced many reforms addressing a multitude of problems. For them, reforms were needed not only in the administration and the government system, but also the people needed reform; each individual needed to change.*
>
> *The reform of the individual or the reform of the self was regarded as the precondition that would open the way for other reforms. Reform of the self, the Taliban believed, started with the transformation of each individual's physical appearance in accordance with Islam, the holy Qu'ran and the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) Sunna and Hadith. Each Taliban member was expected to dress in accordance with the Sunna, let his beard grow and avoid shaving or shortening it in accordance with the Shari'a; the moustache also needed to be trimmed. His*

346. Roy, 1994, 67-68.

347. Roy, 1994, 63.

hair should be shaved or should be short; most definitely a Talib should never have hair that could competes in length with his sister and mother."[348]

The core instruments of their moral drive were the education of a new generation and the *Amr bil Marouf* institution. The core legislation for both offers a glimpse into how they conceived the overall goal. Issued in February 2001, the main decree and a "supplement" relating to the *Amr bil Marouf* offer a sprawling list of actions and offences that individuals could break.[349] It included a ranking of treatment options — "Warning alone shall be sufficient for the highest esteemed people. (Fiqh scholars and the splendid descendants of the Prophet)"[350] — alongside other instructions for officials of the ministry. A catch-all article is included in case the two-dozen pages of prohibited activities does not suffice:

"The personnel for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice can also discourage those vices and promote those virtues that have not been stated in this Regulation, in the light of the provisions of Islamic Sharia and Hanafi jurisprudence."[351]

Indeed, the July 2001 legislation mentioned above begins by noting that the "major and significant duty of the Islamic Emirate is to discourage vices and promote virtue".[352]

With respect to educational policy, the official legislation for the Ministry of Education stated its aims as follows:

"- Maintenance of equal rights of education for all citizens of the Islamic Emirate

- Supervision of education and training so that people will take benefits from primary, secondary, higher and Islamic studies […].

- Taking benefit of equal rights to grow as individuals: physically, mentally and spiritually.

348. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a senior former leader in the Taliban. (Author's copy).

349. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 1-23.

350. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 10.

351. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 20.

352. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 80.

- Getting education and training with honesty, preserving the role for God and retaining feelings towards the homeland, loyalty to the Islamic Emirate, preserving character, the strength of national unity and national principles.

- Development of feelings of personal and social responsibility. […]

- Managing a programme which corresponds to basic Islamic orders without any exceptions […].”[353]

It is clear that while pedagogical goals are mentioned, education was seen as a way to bring up individuals to support and be part of the society they were constructing. “Loyalty” to the Emirate was important at all levels of the government’s efforts, and education was a way to instil this sense from the beginning. Education and the arm of the *Amr bil Marouf* would, therefore, cover the actions of the current generation and the development of the next. For this reason, much of the legislation drafted and strategic thinking of Kandahar’s senior leadership relates to these two purposes. Mullah Mohammad Omar took a special personal interest in the provision and promotion of education in the greater Kandahar area; a significant proportion of newspaper articles about his activities during the years of Taliban rule refer to his visits to these institutions, his support for the construction of new madrassas and his attendance of *dastarbandi* or graduation ceremonies.

(b) Pragmatic politics

Even the most ideological of actors — which the Taliban weren’t, in any case — must take structural and practical factors into account when exercising power within a movement. Thus was it that the Taliban’s 1990s government is filled with moments where various power games were played out between factions or individuals seeking influence. Most of the principles encouraging this behaviour are somewhat universal: the need to gather allies around oneself within a movement in order to shore up influence; the fact that money and funding can offer a useful indicator of relative influence; and the fact that access to the real centres of power was important for how

353. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 1-26.

opinion or *mashhura* ('advice') was evaluated and implemented. In this way, for example, the gradual isolation of Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, the Taliban Foreign Minister — beginning in 1998 and continuing until the very end of the movement — helps explain why the presence of amenable (from the perspective of the United Nations, for example, that characterised him as "the beautiful face of Talibanism")[354] voices within the movement didn't necessarily translate into policy changes.

Rivalry was an important mechanism at play within the Taliban. This was the negative face of competition within the movement. The intentionally opaque structures of power that existed alongside a more formal apparatus and 'council' of ministers in Kabul, for example, encouraged opportunism for access and resources.

The rivalry between Kabul and Kandahar was the clearest manifestation of this, through which individuals located in the nominal capital city became almost a separate centre of power, albeit one marginalised from the real centre of authority, Mullah Mohammad Omar based in Kandahar. By the late 1990s, there were even fears that the head of the Kabul council was going to mount a coup.[355] Similarly, Mutawakil and the officials of the foreign policy apparatus (ambassadors and delegates) became increasingly disconnected from these circles of power on account of the machinations of others closer to key figures in Kandahar. They frequently found that they had to personally travel back for meetings if they were to have any influence.[356] The September 2001 watershed meant the Kabul-Kandahar polarisation never came to a head but by that date it had become clear that some sort of formal decree on the real centres of power would have been necessary if the movement wanted to retain internal and external credibility.

Interviews and what written evidence is available have not shed any light on the extent to which power structures were deliberately set up to encourage this kind of rivalry.

354. United Nations, 2001c, 2.

355. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 165.

356. There were also repeated fears that communications means were all 'compromised' and that sensitive conversations should never be carried out over the national phone lines, for example (Interviews, Kabul, summer 2010).

The use of the *Amr bil Marouf* 'ministry' as a separate paramilitary group within the Taliban's government, alongside the Interior Ministry's formal police forces, made it unclear to citizens and foreign actors alike who was really in charge. In a similar fashion, the large sums of cash flowing through the Defence Ministry in order for them to fight the various ongoing military campaigns meant that individuals gained influence. These rising stars occasionally had to be put in their place when they encroached on the authority of Mullah Mohammad Omar or the Kandahari elites, as happened with Mullah Dadullah following a series of offences.[357] But the rise of the Defence Ministry at the expense of other formal governance institutions like the Ministry of the Interior or the Council of Ministers itself received relatively little pushback from Kandahar.

Frequent shifts of officials through ministerial and sub-ministerial positions — sometimes amounting to complete cabinet reshuffles — were the norm throughout the Taliban's rule. This was believed to help prevent corruption as well as the entrenchment of individuals in certain domains of government. This was encouraged by Mawlawi Ludhianvi's *Obedience the Amir* in which he states:

> *"From time to time, office-holders, specially those office-based gentlemen to whom resources are entrusted, and those working in sensitive departments, must be sent to the front-line. No important worker or comrade/friend must be held back from the front. When they witness the danger of war, when the observe the martyred and the wounded, when they spend a few moments in a hail of bullets, then surely they will learn about death and the afterlife and will repent their sins and seek forgiveness. From the blessings of the battlefield their spirit of martyrdom will be increased. In addition, they will appreciate the requirements and difficulties of the military fronts and the challenges of the mujahideen.*
>
> *POSTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES SHOULD BE ROTATED WITHIN AN APPROPRIATE DURATION*
>
> *No one should stay in a post so long as to become synonymous with that office, that they start to think that the post cannot exist without them, that they are indispensable. In this regard the process of changes and transfers within the Taliban Movement ordered by the Amir ul-Mu'mineen is very positive. God willing it will be extremely fruitful in the long run.*

357. Malkasian, 2013, 61; Popham, 2007.

DO NOT MAKE ANY POST SO ATTRACTIVE THAT OTHER PEOPLE WILL DESIRE ITS LUXURY

It should be ensured that no post or office provides such opportunity for enjoyment that others start to desire it and grab for it.[358]

Mullah Mohammad Omar did this relatively regularly, often failing to explain the reasons for these shifts taking place.[359] This was believed to destabilise possible threats to his authority, too, since individuals in power sometimes built up a certain loyalty among those under them that was antithetical to the notion of the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* as the supreme authority.

Rivalry between poles of power in the country sometimes forced individuals to take action in secret. Mullah Khaksar was reported to have made several secret meetings with officials representing the United States in the late 1990s/early 2000s over the issue of bin Laden.[360] He sought to avoid those within the movement who were close to bin Laden and his affiliates. Ultimately the discussions came to nothing but consequently the manipulation of these different factions within the movement was something that external actors frequently employed as a means of influencing the state.

Another element of this practical political action was debate and dialogue. This internal stew of opinion and advice was a firm part of how Mullah Mohammad Omar saw the movement operating, and finds sanction in Mawlawi Ludhianvi's manual, *Obedience to the Amir*:

"THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVICE

In the Koran and the hadiths every amir is instructed that, for important matters he should seek the advice of his companions who have three qualities

1. Virtuous and sincere

358. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015, 65-66.

359. Ministers moved to new positions were sometimes not even personally informed. Mullah Zaeef, for example, found out he had been appointed Ambassador to Pakistan on the radio (Zaeef, 2010, 101).

360. Gannon, 2006, chapters 2 and 4.

2. Well loved

3. Experienced

To understand the importance of advice it should be suffice to note that the prophet ordered:

"Take counsel with those companions" (Qur'an 3:159).

The prophet received direct instructions from God and who could have better sense and understanding than the prophet?"

[…]

Remember well that the purpose of ordering consultation with the shura or advisers was never to impose the decision of the shura as binding on the amir or to force the amir to accept the advice. […] In Shariat, the status of the shura is simply to advise, ensure that all the different aspects of an issue should be brought to the attention of the amir. In giving advice, members of the shura should do so with complete integrity".[361]

The final three chapters of the book encourages this practice from two directions. Section six encourages the *Amir* (i.e. Mullah Mohammad Omar) to take advice, section seven explains what he should do with that advice, and section eight offers advice to his *shura* or other advice-givers.

Technically, the council of ministers in Kabul was meant to be the main pole of advice, but Mullah Mohammad Omar had several other formal and informal groups around him which he consulted. This included a group of senior *ulemaa*', a semi-formal *shura* in Kandahar and occasional groups of Pakistani clerics who would all spend time offering their opinions and advice on the whole variety of issues that the Taliban's government faced. It is worth considering the efforts of the constitutional commission that began work in 1999. They never formalised or finished their work prior to the collapse of the Taliban government, in part because the informal centres of power made it impossible to reconcile the ideal-type government that they were attempting to draft and the realities of how Mullah Mohammad Omar chose to rule.

Policy debate, therefore, happened at a variety of levels. The most effective discussions — with the highest likelihood of influencing how power was implemented — took place directly with Mullah Mohammad Omar. The strategic discussions taken in Kabul were not unimportant, but whatever was discussed needed

361. Rasheed Ludhianvi, 2015, 74.

ultimately to be brought before the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* for formal sanction. Note, however, that on the very local levels of government (provincial, to some extent, and in the districts) different dynamics allowed action to be taken on a variety of issues; in fact, some of the movement's most progressive actions were taken at this level.[362]

This dialogue was, for the most part, verbal and took place in groups or between individuals. The Taliban's senior circles had relatively little tolerance for documenting those discussions, it seems, certainly not in any formal fashion available to archivists and located thus far, which makes reconstructing that debate difficult, if not impossible. Some retrospective testimony allows for glimpses of this process, but it is difficult to know how much of this has been retroactively constructed to justify certain positions, especially in the light of everything that has happened since the fall of the government in late 2001. Even religious debate and influence — potentially a better source on account of their reliance and familiarity with written documentation — seems to have taken place on a direct verbal basis rather than through the drafting of formal texts. Suggestions are occasionally made through media outlets, but individuals within the government were wary of such public avenues on account of the limitations imposed on civil society and public debate in general. The fact that uproar over the actions of the *Amr bil Marouf* erupted onto the pages of Herat's *Ettefaq-e Islam* newspaper, for example, is an indication of the strength of opinion on the matter.[363] Most discussions of consequence are absent from the formal written record, however, and historians must content themselves with trace outlines and scraps of opinions on the peripheries.

A final key element of the Taliban's political decision-making apparatus is fiat or direct orders made, for example, by Mullah Mohammad Omar. This was often the result of advice solicited from a variety of sources and sometimes stemmed, too, from a moral conviction, such as seems to have been the case in the matter of the Bamiyan

362. Note, for example, the efforts taken in the greater Paktya area in coordination with CARE and the Swedish Committee to provide education for girls, their results far exceeding that of any previous government in Afghan history. (Interviews, Kabul, June & July 2012).

363. Editorial team, 1999e.

Buddhas.[364] The reliance on executive fiat to drive policy was a consequence of the multipolar system around the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* but in the latter years of their reign this reliance on the issuance of laws meant their power seemed to weaken; the vast number of laws — sometimes overlapping or even revealing impotence in that they were repetitions of previously issued legislation — revealed the extent to which they were being followed in practice around the country.

This reliance on executive order was a reflection of the core belief that disunity was the reason for the breakdown of order around the country in the post-Soviet interregnum. Formalising and acting with strong leadership was believed to be the key to revitalising the country's damaged institutions:

> *"The Taliban, however, by their nature were very different from a government, with different cultural and religious roots. Obedience was the most important principle for the Taliban and formed much of the basis for any operations. Decision-making was very much centralised to Mullah Mohammad Omar and the senior Taliban council.*
>
> *Our organisational structure was more like that of a military division than a civil government department. At the time when the Taliban formed in 1994, there was no government. The administration had long ceased functioning or being able to implement any policies since its own prime minister was busy shelling his own capital on a daily basis.*
>
> *A strong government was needed, but we had no such thing in Afghanistan. Government departments, police stations, directorates and districts were divided among hostile forces that fought each other."*[365]

Later on, as previously noted, the nature of how the system functioned meant that policy could be driven from the bottom-up (as in the case of district chiefs or provincial governors) or from the top-down (as with formal orders from Mullah Mohammad Omar).

This use of strong-handing and fiat meant, naturally, that measures to avoid implementing these orders evolved. In particular, ways of avoiding requests and orders from Mullah Mohammad Omar were often quite creative. In February 2000, for example, the United Nations noted in an internal briefing document that non-

364. See below for a more extensive exploration of this issue.

365. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

Kandahar senior leadership figures had started to move their families to Pakistan on account of a feeling of insecurity in Kabul. Removing one's physical presence was, indeed, much practiced as a way of avoiding the summons to serve, as the career of Mullah Zaeef shows. He frequently sought to avoid positions of power during the 1990s government on account of personal aversion to certain policies or because of corruption (as was the case in the Ministry of Defence in which he served in 1998. Each time he returned to his life in the villages, only to be summoned back into the government (sometimes formally, with the threat of serious consequences if he ignored messages) once again following an order by Mullah Mohammad Omar.[366]

Pragmatic political action (or inaction) was very much a part of how the Taliban movement functioned on a day-to-day basis, therefore. The nature of how power structures were set up meant that activity in this domain was one of the most significant areas to affect change.

(c) Improvisation / chance

(i) Inexperience and other factors

Retrospective examinations of policy have a tendency to assume intentionality in every unearthed decision. While this may be appropriate in some cases, for the Taliban it obscures the fact that much of what happened was the result of improvisation and/or spur-of-the-moment decisions. As we have seen, the considered exercise of policy for moral ends did take place, but it did so alongside a much more improvisational approach.

The primary reason for this was the reality of the Taliban movement in 1994-6: most of those who found themselves in de facto ministerial positions had no experience of government (civil or otherwise). They were young and inexperienced, and interviews in the present day often yield the admission that they were out of their depth. The

366. Zaeef, 2010, chapters 8-10.

following table lists the ages of a number of those who were active in the Taliban's leadership:

Name	Age
Jalaluddin Haqqani	49
Mullah Mohammad Rabbani	41
Mullah Obaidullah	35
Mullah Mohammad Omar	34
Mullah Dadullah	29
Mullah Fazl	29
Mullah Abdur Razzaq	28
Mullah Mottaqi	28
Mullah Zaeef	28
Mullah Beradar	28
Mullah Osmani	27

Figure 5: Ages of Taliban figures in 1996

Many had some experience negotiating amongst groups during the early 1990s, and the two years following the founding of their movement in 1994 were a crash-course in many different aspects of national policy and international diplomacy. Those involved in foreign policy discussions, and who were deputed to liaise with foreign representatives, set up a kind of discussion and study circle together in Peshawar to start to think about the movement's foreign policy direction.[367]

International interlocutors noted in interviews that the Talibs with whom they spoke were frequently ignorant of the relevant protocol in the beginning, but added that they

367. Interviews, Kabul, May & June 2013.

were quick to address this problem. Nevertheless, there is only so much the young leaders were able to learn in such a short time.

By taking Kabul in 1996, the Taliban captured not only the capital but also the state institutions. Much like they enforced social rules that governed much of rural southern Afghanistan, they transplanted rural informal governance structures into the weak state organs they attempted to reconstitute. Ministries were run like tribal shura meetings, with an open door policy. Individuals could literally walk into the office of the minister and present their issue in person. Interviewees described how the offices of Ministers differed little from mud-hut rooms in southern Afghanistan, with rudimentary furniture and the minister surrounded by their aides and childhood friends.

Those involved in those early years of the Taliban government all mention the numerous challenges that faced them. Not only was much of the country's infrastructure destroyed and banks empty but massive emigration during the war years meant that many of the country's best and brightest were unavailable to help rebuild. To this must also be added the fact that international aid was somewhat limited to subsistence, the prevention of starvation and so on. There was no groundswell of international support to help in the revitalisation of the country's economy or institutions; indeed, only three countries had even offered diplomatic recognition of the Taliban's government in 1996.[368]

During those early years, officials considered the current configuration of their government to be temporary. This is born out by statements from the time and recollections of meetings. These suggest that they believed that they were just caretakers of the government until a point when they could hand it over to others, or participate in a shared government with other more experienced and respected political figures. Note, for example, a news report from June 1995 in which Mullah Mohammad Omar delegated a five-man commission to examine the possibility of establishing "a grand Islamic Shura for all the people of Afghanistan" through which

368. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all offered their recognition following the fall of Mazar-e Sharif in May 1997 (Fergusson, 2011, 84).

"all conflicts and rifts in the country should be resolved through peaceful negotiations between the involved parties".[369]

The taking of Kabul in 1996 was a watershed in this respect, since the divisions between their forces and those fighting against them (Hekmatyar, Ismael Khan and Rabbani/Massoud, foremost among others) had cemented and the numbers of dead reached such levels that the consensus started to tend towards unilateral rule. As previously mentioned, the fact that there were few remaining of what they considered to be morally uncompromised political figures. In this situation, and coming on a wave of relief at taking the capital, they appointed what they labelled a "caretaker" shura but it was clear that they were at least starting to think of their government as one that could govern the nation.

A general sense of impermanence remained part of the experience of rule, however. Ministerial shuffling and the regular rotation of those in positions of power was a key part of this. Seeking to prevent power monopolies and corruption, disorientation was both goal and effect. Power games between factions and the unwritten nature of how the government functioned also meant that positions were often left un-filled, such as was the case following the death of Mullah Mohammad Rabbani in 2001. The lack of permanence gave Mullah Mohammad Omar and those round him a flexibility in how they chose to exercise executive authority. There were efforts to reform government structures — most of which were initiated out of Kabul rather than Kandahar — but few gained any real traction in the real power centres of the movement.

It is also important to recall just how much was going on during the first few years of the movement's activities. Not only did the entire country have to be rebuilt, but the leadership were managing serious military engagements on multiple fronts. These high levels of activity and the requirements for responsiveness might not have been that big a problem if it weren't for the fact that few structures were in place to reduce the sense of overwhelm. Most decisions of any import had to pass through the office of Mullah Mohammad Omar, if not receive personal sanction itself. Decisions taken outside this chain of command were thus liable to being overturned. The statement issued by

369. Editorial team, 1995c.

Mullah Mohammad Omar on the fall of Kabul in September 1996 offers a good example of this. After a peremptory line about how "a pure Islamic government will rule in Afghanistan", the entire text is a list of practicalities: the suspension of the foreign diplomatic corps not associated with the Taliban movement, a request that residents not flee the city, instructions that de-mining agencies should resume their work in Kabul to make roads safe, and a request to traders to resume the import of food and fuel into the country.[370] This is all about practicalities, almost as if there was no time to consider the magnitude of what had just taken place.

One final point is worth noting with regard to the inexperience of those taking power. While close to all appointees had little experience in the fields they were tasked with, there appeared to be a common approach amongst the Taliban as to how to get to grips with their new jobs. After their appointment, ministers or heads of department would embark on a learning and fact-finding mission during which they met with technocrats, officials and others in order to learn about the challenges, rules and regulations that had governed the institution they were to run. One interviewee related the experience within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996:

> *"Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai talked to the people. He said: "We have no experience in the governance sphere and we only want honesty from everybody. If in the future I understand somebody used or misused our trust, I will meet with him and punish him." We weren't sure about the message of this ministry, but it was very interesting for me to watch, [having been employed there before the Taliban arrived]. In a very short time they understood everything about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They asked from everybody — I was one of the advisors — about the procedures of every department and every desk of political affairs."*[371]

Mullah Zaeef relates a similar approach taken when he was working in the government's administration of the transport sector in 2000.[372] It meant that each new minister essentially started from scratch upon appointment, often leading to a mismatch in continuity within departments and ministries.

370. Omar, 1996.

371. Interview, Kabul, April 2013.

372. Zaeef, 2010, 98-100.

(ii) Responders, not planners

Given this inexperience and the other surrounding factors, it is useful to see the Taliban in much of their policy as responders and not planners. We can even go back further in the history of those involved to find roots of this characterisation from the 1980s onwards. The war and their participation was not something they initiated, after all; they responded to the stimuli traced back to the Communist Afghan government and their Soviet allies.

Even with the post-war chaos of the 1990s, we can trace the impetus for action to forces exogenous to the Taliban. Mullah Zaeef describes how most of the Taliban and religious scholars who had fought together during the 1980s in the south simply went home or took up their studies again:

> *"The Taliban reduced their operations considerably once the Russians left Kandahar. Many others like myself focused more on their religious studies again, while maintaining security and conducting a few operations against the Communists in remote areas. I continued teaching villagers and religious students in Nelgham along with other mujahedeen, but we soon decided to settle somewhere else. [...] The Taliban didn't involve themselves in [the inter-party fighting in Kabul], and in any case most had returned home by now. Mullah Mohammad Omar turned our old mujahedeen base in Sangisar into a madrassa. I briefly considered staying there as well, but without any work it would be difficult. I decided to return to my wife and children."*[373]

An overview of the locations of some prominent figures later associated with the post-1994 Taliban movement underscores this reality:

373. Zaeef, 2010, 49.

Name	*Location*	*Occupation*
Amir Khan Muttaqi	Peshawar	Bodyguard to Nabi Mohammadi
Hafiz Abdul Majid		Village life
Mawlawi Abdul Rahman	Sangisar	Teaching/studying
Mawlawi Deobandi		Village life
Mawlawi Nuruddin Turabi	Kandahar	Nothing
Mullah Berader	Sangisar	Teaching/studying
Mullah Dadullah		Village life
Mullah Fazl		Village life
Mullah Ghazi	Sangisar	Teaching/studying
Mullah Khaksar	Quetta	Shopkeeper (shoes)
Mullah Mohammad Omar	Sangisar	Teaching/studying
Mullah Obaidullah		Village life
Mullah Rabbani	Arghestan	Village life
Mullah Yarana	Sangisar	Teaching/studying
Tayyeb Agha	Quetta	High-school student

Figure 6: Locations of prominent Taliban figures during 1990–4 period

Eventually, however, the situation unfolding around them seemed to call for action. Indeed, a prominent part of the Taliban's founding myth is how they were provoked by the circumstances in their local area to take action. In the words of Mullah Mohammad Omar:

> *"I used to study in a school in the city of "Sanj Sar" in Qandahār with about 20 other of my fellow students. Then corruption took over the land, murder, looting and robbery reached alarming proportions, and control was in the hands of the corrupt and wicked ones, and no one imagined that it was possible to change this condition and rectify this situation. […] I said to them, 'It is not possible to continue studying in these situations, and those problems will not be solved by slogans that are not backed up. We, the students, want to stand up against this corruption. If you want to truly work for the Religion of Allah, then we must leave the studies."*[374]

From the moment the movement officially began, more territory meant more problems and new situations for them to encounter. This was inevitable, but it is often forgotten in accounts of the Taliban's political agenda and minimised in characterisations of their activities. Indeed, when the Taliban took over much of the

374. Ibn Mahmud, 2005, 16.

territory of Nangarhar province following the fall of Hekmatyar to the south and in the wake of successful negotiations with tribal and other key players in the area, they also took on responsibility for bin Laden. We will return to the details of that case in chapter eight, but for now it suffices to note that bin Laden was seen as an issue they had 'inherited'.[375] Similarly, other issues that weren't initiated by the Taliban became matters they had to handle without any relevant experience, or events happened that required immediate responses.

Government structures reflected a laissez-faire approach that amounted to an expectation that ministers would use what structures already existed and change and adapt to circumstances along the way.[376] Indeed, those who sought to make plans for the long-term do not seem to have been rewarded or incentivised within the movement. (A significant exception to this is in the case of moral policy, to which I shall return.)

Meetings between ministers and international NGOs or United Nations officials in Kabul were plagued by a mutual realisation that — even if rapport was established and good policy or cooperation agreed upon — national-level policy decisions were ultimately not in their hands. The nature of the Taliban's structures meant, however, that ad hoc decisions were sometimes taken, such as was the case with a CARE programme to support widows in Kabul, for example:

> *"A lot of NGOs actually got expelled from Afghanistan during that period. We had a large widows feeding programme in Kabul, so they were busy trying to close down NGO operations and make life difficult. [Our representative] went to the Taliban Minister of Planning [Qari Din Mohammad, originally from Badakhshan] and said, 'look I don't want to talk about your edict, but I want to have permission to continue the widows feeding programme.' he said, 'yeah, of course, that makes sense; we don't want to hurt the widows of Afghanistan.' And she said, 'Can I have that in writing', and so he said come back tomorrow. So she managed to negotiate a letter from them as official permission to continue the widows feeding programme."*[377]

375. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 134-144.

376. One account of Mullah Mohammad Omar describes him jotting down instructions for his military commanders on the wrapping paper inside a cigarette packet (Devji, 2015).

377. Interview, Kabul, July 2012.

In this way, Taliban policy often ran at cross-purposes, with edicts contravening the reality of policy implementation on the ground. This was a consequence of the tendency to improvise instead of engage in planning. In the face of intransigence or difficulties with regard to national-level policy, officials took decisions of their own, many of which led to significant contradictions. One interviewee working in the field of education during the 1990s period noted that one of the most successful mixed (girls as well as boys) schools supported by the Swedish Committee was located near Mullah Mottaqi's house in Ghazni province, this at a time when girls schools had notionally paused their operations.

A constantly expanding leadership shura in Kandahar, alongside the formation of various other advisory groups and councils, reveals the Taliban not only expanding their reach — taking on new influences, tribes and ethnicities — but shows how accretion sometimes stood in for policy.[378]

An important exception to this mixture of reluctance and inability to plan was the movement's agenda for reform and moral change. In this, legislation was seen as the panacea to solve all the country's problems, and many senior clerics set to this task with enthusiasm. The case studies that follow will show how these three core factors (moral drive, pragmatic politics, and improvisation and chance) all came together.

378. Dorronsoro notes that initially Mullah Mohammad Omar was backed by a ten-man shura. Following the capture of Herat this increased to 30 in 1995, and by the time Kabul was captured the shura had increased in to 100 members (Dorronsoro, 2005, 280).

6. Policy in Practice I — Internal

(a) Structuring government

The question of intent in how the Taliban set up their government is an important means of assessing the extent to which the senior leadership relied on their heritage to draw up the schema or rather innovate with new ideas. The literature has, thus far, given this area scant coverage, in part on account of the paucity of sources available with which to analyse matters. This section, therefore, uses a range of documents written while they were still in power to assess the way the Taliban sought to rule. I make relatively little use of retrospective interview material, here, since the likelihood that subjects' memories are contaminated given the ongoing conflict and the fact that questions of state continue to exercise involved parties means there is much to be gained from revisionist histories.

(i) Theories of Taliban governance

There are several operating theories of how governance and power functioned under the Taliban government. The most popular is that of the onion, the idea that the structures set up were like concentric circles or layers. As each successive layer was peeled back, this theory holds, you get closer to the primary source of power. In this theory, Mullah Mohammad Omar is located in the centre of the onion/circles; all power emanates from him. This is a useful way of looking at the Taliban's government, not least because there were clearly parts of the state apparatus that had minimal access to those who took decisions. This hierarchical vision of Mullah Mohammad Omar runs into problems, however, when we start to allocate the various layers of government; it wasn't as clear as this metaphor suggests.

A slightly different vision of the Taliban's government removes the hierarchy altogether and rather contends that it was unipolar: Mullah Mohammad Omar stands directly in the centre and all decisions flow through him. This allows for more flexibility in that it

allows that the difference between the different ministries and state structures was not static, but it still assumes that the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* was necessary for a decision to be taken.

A more compelling approach might be suggested by the idea of parallel universes. In this way, the hierarchy exists and the state flows through the office of Mullah Mohammad Omar, but at the same time actors on the ground can take seemingly important decisions independently of this unipolar reality. Of course, all models are deficient in their distance from the textured context of day-to-day reality from 1994-2001, but it is worth bearing them in mind as we explore the nature of the Taliban state going forward.

(ii) 'Temporary'

Another point to be held in mind throughout is the idea of the Taliban's government as "temporary". They used different words to express this idea — 'caretaker', 'acting government' and so on — as the word "temporary" comes with a host of bad associations. Not only is there reluctance on Islamic grounds — government *fi sabil Allah* must be something steadfast, something permanent, if not eternal — but the deal-making and negotiations of the early 1990s and the failed mujahedeen governments had often employed terminology that used the concept of 'temporary'. Nevertheless, there was considerable reluctance to give the government structures a final imprimatur, not least of all that so much of it had been inherited from the old Zahir Shahi state and repurposed as "Islamic". Indeed, this reluctance to delve into criticism of the nature of the state structures openly in print — as evidenced by the newspaper, radio and magazine records we have available to us now — seems to have partly been the result of this.

This ran alongside the argument that no discussion about the state could take place until all hundred percent of Afghanistan's territory was under Taliban control. Retrospective accounts of the Taliban government are replete with excuses for poor conduct all gathered together by the idea that their efforts were only 'temporary' while

they busied themselves with reconquering territory and seeking resources.[379] One account written post-2001 by a senior Taliban minister thus concludes:

> *"Positions were regarded as temporary in order to allow for negotiations with opposition groups. Peace talks were always preferred to conflict, and in this way a joint government could have been established, granting new partners government positions and ministries. It was for this reason that no ministers or prime minister were officially appointed for a long time."*[380]

There is some truth to this, even if the extent to which they had the power to take decisions is often downplayed. The state structures may have been temporary, but they were substantial enough to make policy that affected the lives of Afghanistan's citizens. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous and wilfully ignorant of the historical record.

It is also worth recalling the senior leadership's inferiority complex at this point. Mullah Mohammad Omar, as previously mentioned, was in particular afflicted by this, it seems, and those around him followed suit though they didn't carry the mantle of *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* and the pressures this brought. Thus, advice and (to some extent) consensus were important features of how he chose to exercise his power. This is important with relation to the state, especially given that their project of governing "Islamically" was one that brought a host of options and no firm defaults.

(iii) Taliban approaches to the state, 1995-7

An assessment of publicly-expressed attitudes towards state-formation from 1995-7 offers some insight into how senior leaders and Ulemaa' viewed the Taliban's infant state as structures were first negotiated.

In the beginning, with the Taliban movement between *loy* Kandahar and Kabul, leaders were still deciding their trajectory and their longer-term goals. The swift nature of how territory fell to their forces (and the accumulating buildup of recruits and

379. Mutawakil, 2007; Zaeef, 2010; Agha, 2014.

380. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

volunteers) meant that events began to force decisions rather than the other way round. For this reason, it is natural that higher-level goals were most often stated as expressions of the movement's intent. Thus, we can find the following:

- Religious scholar Mawlawi Enayatullah (May 1995): "*ending tyranny and injustice*"[381]

- June 1995: *"put an end to tyranny and oppression in this land"; "rebuild [the] beautiful country and live in it peacefully"*[382]

- Pakistani cleric, Mawlawi Ludhianvi (August 1995): *"The only ambition of this movement is to establish an Islamic government in Afghanistan where the true and pure laws of the Koran can be implemented and people can live according to their Islamic values. That is exactly what the Afghan people want and that is what they have fought for and made sacrifices for. The Afghan people do not want any other regime or ideology or government. They are pure and pious Muslims and would spend their lives according to their faith."*[383]

United Nations internal briefing documents written by those dealing with Taliban officials state that there was little that could be termed a forward-thinking plan relating to state structures, and certainly not before 1996 and the fall of Kabul.[384]

Editorials in publications run by the Taliban called for "an Islamic system", but few specifics were ever given. One published in June 1995 was the exception, listing four goals for the Taliban:

- *"to bring permanent peace and security to this country"*
- *"to disarm illegal militias in areas under their control and confiscate all illegal weapons"*
- *"to revive the education sector"*
- *"the implementation of Islamic law in this country"*[385]

381. Enayatullah, 1995.
382. Mohammadyar, 1995.
383. Ludhianvi, 1995.
384. Author's copy.
385. Editorial team, 1995g.

Whenever clerics themselves addressed the issue of Taliban goals, they tended to invocations to "follow the shari'a" as being paramount. In April 1995, Mullah Mottaqi addressed a meeting stating that:

> *"the Taliban movement did not act upon anyone's orders. They only thing they obeyed were the Sharia, and the Sharia does not follow any other law."*[386]

Mawlawi Mohammad Yusuf, speaking at a meeting in August 1995, stated that:

> *"The aim of the Islamic movement of the Taliban is to establish a purely Islamic system in this country. This movement wants to implement the principles of the Koran because that is the only way towards success and peace and stability in this country."*[387]

Religious scholars are seen as bearing greater amounts of responsibility for the country though again the specifics of this are mostly unclear. We can gather that there is a duty to perform, but the exact description evades us as in this editorial from April 1995:

> *"Allah has said in the Koran that there will be a group of people among you who will invite people to good, and will ask them to promote virtue and prevent vice. These are the people who will be safe from the wrath of Allah. It is clear that this group of people are the religious scholars. They are the true heirs of the prophets. They have the responsibility to promote virtue and prevent vice on earth. They explain to their people the principles and orders that are part of the sharia. They clean the society from corruption, injustice and atrocity. They rescue the society from doom and destruction. They work for the establishment of peace and calm in a society, which is the right of every single individual. They try to fulfil their duty, bestowed upon them by Allah, in the best possible way."*[388]

Some seem to indicate that simply following Islamic institutions and teachings will be enough guidance as to reveal policy:

386. Editorial team, 1995f.

387. Editorial team, 1995j.

388. Moosa, 1995.

"fortunately the Ulama and the Taliban proved by their present freeing policy, that in practical field it is the Ulama only who know how to govern and how to solve people's problems and are second to none in practice. They have also shown to the world that the Taliban who are trained in Islamic ideology and Qur'anic instructions are better in practical politics than anyone else."[389]

A certain "Mawlawi Ahmadullah from Kabul province" spoke at a meeting of clerics in Kandahar in August 1995 in which he listed "three golden principles of Islam which were important for the establishment of an Islamic system in the country":

1) *qisas*, i.e. the Islamic principle of retributive justice. ("He said if this principle is properly implemented in the society then no murders will take place.")

2) *zina*, i.e. adultery. ("As a result no one will commit such a crime again.")

3) *jihad*. ("the Muslim nation should rise as one and stand united against any aggression which undermines their identity and their faith").[390]

For the most part, therefore, in 1995 the Taliban's goals were, where specific at all, negatively-oriented for the most part, formulated in the form "rid the country of *x* or *y*" rather than anything beyond the simple call to "implement the *shari'a*".

In 1996, we can find traces of change to these attitudes, albeit delicately balanced as if no one approach is favoured over another. An interview with Mullah Mohammad Omar from spring/summer of that year has him offer the possibility of handing over Taliban power to a new governing body:

"We are committed to disarm all warring factions, then let the Afghan people to determine, in peace and security, the type of government that it intends to give his country."[391]

389. Misdaq, 1995.

390. Editorial team, 1995j.

391. Torabi, 1996.

The interviewer follows with a question about a possible role for the exiled former King, Zahir Shah, but the Taliban leader dodges the question, refusing to reject or confirm the possibility of his inclusion in such a government setup. A news report from November 1996 tells of efforts by the Taliban to redistribute land, an action always bearing significance in Afghanistan, following "illegal seizures" by "strongmen". Here we can find the Taliban balancing between two poles: their idealism and a sense of justice on the one hand, and the pragmatics of needing to keep landowners on board and not alienate the real stakeholders in the provinces newly under their control.[392]

By 1997, the Taliban movement had passed through two key inflexion points: the fall of Kabul and Mullah Mohammad Omar's assumption of the title *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*. While the reticence about specifying the functions of state remained, there were traces of discussion as to the practical future of the movement.[393] The higher-level goals are still present and stated in editorials and speeches by clerics and leaders — an emirate based on justice rather than on oppression and cruelty[394] — but we start to see more granularity in how these approaches are specified.

A Dari-language editorial in September 1997, lists the following conditions as the basis for "an Islamic peace":

"*1. The Movement must be Islamic*

2. Should be able to apply the edicts of the Islamic shari'a

3. Should have a capable Islamic Army that can control the whole country

4. An Islamic powerful Army with sincerity and capabilities; one that is loyal to the people and to dear Islam

5. Continuous Islamic attempts for the implementation of nationwide peace

392. Editorial team, 1996c.

393. Kandahar governor, Mullah Mohammad Hassan, sidesteps several questions on the precise functions of the state in an interview with a French aid worker in October 1997, for example (Rahmani, 1997).

394. Sanan, 1997.

6. Continuous struggle for the great jihad and for thrashing the rebellious dissenters and the unbelieving forces

7. In general, authoritative characteristics and total responsibility in the affairs of defending the country's independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national honour vis-à-vis the rebellion of the dissenters and foreign occupiers and to stand against any kind of foreign conspiracy and plot"[395]

This still bears traces of negative-orientation (against those allied with Rabbani, Massoud *et al.*) but it is clear that discussions now revolve around a national framework. Indeed, by December 1997, Mullah Mohammad Omar is speaking of a "huge" aim, one needed "to improve our invalid past".[396] The need to complete the territorial gains of the three years prior were a key part of this agenda; after a certain number of provinces fell to Taliban forces and negotiators, it almost became inevitable that they would seek to take the rest. This was most often phrased as a need to "rescue" Muslim "brothers". An editorial in the Taliban's flagship newspaper on the first anniversary of Mullah Mohammad Omar becoming *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* was clear in calling on the government to complete what they had begun, i.e. the conquest of territory.[397] In August 1997, the Taliban leader stated that the movement was "busy in holy wars for the territorial integrity of the Afghanistan and for implementation of the Islamic Sharia and with the Will of God Almighty".[398]

Power-sharing was increasingly on the agenda, prompted by ongoing negotiations mediated through the United Nations, though several editorials and statements make a general reluctance quite clear. *Shariat* newspaper ran such a commentary in August 1997, for example, satirising the demands of the non-Taliban forces: "Then we will talk about a broad-based government, namely, so very broad that our groups, light and heavy weapons, cars, properties and private jets, fun and games are all accommodated as part of it."[399]

395. Editorial team, 1997g.
396. Editorial team, 1997j.
397. Editorial team, 1997c.
398. Omar, 1997b.
399. Editorial team, 1997d.

This brief overview of some of the public statements on the direction of the state illustrates just how vague some of the discussions of the movement's future path were. The sections that follow attempt a description of the structures that did exist alongside a look at the only systematic and substantial internal reevaluation of these structures that the movement undertook before its fall, i.e. the constitutional commission. By 1998, most of the key structural and procedural innovations implemented by the Taliban had somewhat solidified and it is thus useful to begin our exploration of the specific structures at that point.

(iv) Structures

(1) "an Islamic system"

It is worth taking a moment to consider the ideal-type "Islamic government" which the Taliban so often referred to as offering a model uncontaminated by human interference. Indeed, statements from and interactions with Taliban figures at the time seemed always to begin from a seemingly self-evident point that this would be their basic system. The very idea of a model "Islamic government" is difficult as a concept, however, in part because there are very few practical details that can be derived from the Qur'an, to start with.[400] The hadith record offers more, as do the reports of the sunna, the actions of the Prophet Mohammad, but these are still not the descriptions of the workings of a state. Much of the present-day notion of what an 'Islamic state' means is, in fact, derived from the experience of the Muslim rulers who succeeded the Prophet Mohammad, notably the four *rashidun* caliphs but not by any means limited to those precedents.[401]

It was to these former examples that the Taliban would refer, alongside the basic principles for how an Islamic society was to function in their understanding. The idea of a strong judiciary made up of independent clerics who functioned as a check on power was one strong theme that featured in how the Taliban chose to structure their

400. Shahin, 2015; Feldman, 2008, 19-55.
401. Kadi and Shahin, 2015, 44-45.

state. This was itself a departure from the example derived from the Prophet's time, since he had combined judiciary and executive functions in one person.[402] The theme of a power imbalance between the judiciary and the executive (in the personage of the Caliph) is a prominent theme in the history of the early examples of so-called Muslim states, and the growth of the four Sunni legal schools, for example, must be evaluated in the light of this interaction.[403] The apogee of this tension was the *mihna* or 'trial' begun by Caliph Ma'moon and continued until the reign of Caliph Mutawakil in the mid-ninth century CE.[404]

Where there was agreement and focus within the Islamic narrative was on the nature of the character of the *amir*, a feature often referenced in nostalgic 'stories from earlier years' sidebars in newspapers published under the Taliban.[405] This seems to reflect the need for the emergence of charismatic leadership, and a sense that if the right leader was found, then the subsequent details of rule would be easier to handle. It is thus the moral profile of the leader that was considered to be of prime importance.

(2) The system

After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban and the resurrection of government ministries and the cabinet, the Taliban effectively operated through two parallel state structures. The original had evolved out of the group of individuals that had started the movement. It was dominated by informal institutions and would remain the centre of power and decision making till the end of their government. The second was the new or resurrected state structures.

While the original informal organisation headed up the state structures, the individuals who staffed the departments hardly changed, and ministries were staffed with the remnants of the technocrats that had stayed behind. The resulting state institutions remained rudimentary. The newly-appointed and often-changing heads of

402. Feldman, 2008, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1857.
403. Feldman, 2008, 19-55.
404. Stewart, 2015, 225-227.
405. Editorial team, 1995i; Sanan, 1997.

ministries and departments lacked knowledge and expertise, and the technocrats that had bothered to return were ill-equipped to run a country, especially without resources with which to take action. The informal relationship between the new state structures and the original Taliban structures that remained in power in Kandahar further undermined the formal institutions.

Documents of western governments and the testimony of interviewees makes it clear that the attempts to understand the morphing government system — with its idiosyncratic structures, personalities, and uneasy blend of formal and informal institutions — was difficult. Attempts to classify and order the Taliban's government mostly added to the confusion, given that actions were wrongly understood or misinterpreted.

Even within the Taliban, at the cabinet level, some disagreements made it confusing and frustrating for reform-minded individuals to operate:

> *"Were were responsible for the institutions inside Afghanistan — for the implementation of projects and so on. We had a plan to take chrome stones and to sell the chromite. We found big machines in China to mine and discover this inside Afghanistan, and we wanted to do this work ourselves because the Chinese weren't doing the big projects. We wanted to do it ourselves. We sent a delegation to China. We got quotes for the machines. We were ready to buy them, but there was disarray inside Afghanistan — what with the military situation in Mazar and Panjshir — so we didn't do anything."*[406]

The improvised structured that resulted was characterised by a considerable lack of formal process and an uneven implementation of rules. Mullah Mohammad Hassan, the Taliban governor of Kandahar, for example, was involved in foreign affairs to a great degree, hosting meetings with foreign delegations and dignitaries. He had considerable power in other fields of governance extending far beyond the normal mandate of a governor due to his close relationship with Mullah Mohammad Omar, and his position as member of the central shura that served as supreme governing council till the end of the Emirate.[407]

406. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

407. This was not always the case, and consultative bodies were put in place at times. In particular, religious scholars would have a say. This decreased over time, with the central shura and Mullah

Ultimate power, as almost all interviewees confirmed, lay with the leadership of Mullah Mohammad Omar in Kandahar, surrounded by his trusted advisors. There was, however, no established process of how the institutions in Kabul related to Kandahar. While it was clear that the ultimate decision would lay with Mullah Mohammad Omar, not all decisions were referred to Kandahar. No clear guideline defined when an issue was 'too important' to be handled by a minister, governor or head of department. The relationship of the official to Mullah Mohammad Omar, as well as his standing and personal support network, would determine how he dealt with issues.

One mode of operation that developed was that government officials, ministers, governors, would take a decision on an issue, or find a solution to a problem, and often would implement it before asking for approval. This was sometimes then followed by a reversal of the decision by Kandahar.

> *"They had two modes of action: highly decentralised and highly centralised. Approach things in a certain way and it has to go through Mullah Omar, and you get the highly centralised. Approach it in another way, so that those people who exercised Mullah Mohammad Omar's authority are able to behave in a very decentralised way, and they could say go do it."*[408]

For things like foreign policy, these were almost always referred up to Mullah Mohammad Omar, however.

> *"All the power. Military power. Political power. All the power belonged to Mullah Mohammad Omar. And also the foreign ministry here in Kabul was not able to decide about any important case without the permission of Mullah Saheb."*[409]

With Mullah Mohammad Omar being solely concerned with principle and disregard for consequences, the informal relationship between the new state structures and the

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Mohammad Omar often ruling on his own regardless of other governing bodies or consultative gatherings.

408. Interview, Skype (online), May 2013.

409. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

original Taliban structures that remained in power in Kandahar further undermined the formal institutions.

The ability of local commanders and Taliban representatives to conduct and implement their own decisions depended on their personal standing amongst the Taliban leadership, and their constituency and support. Of particular importance to the central leadership, as outlined before, was perception, and therefore the control of information. As a UN report stated:

> *"The Taliban prefer ignoring, or pretending to ignore, necessary arrangements that deviate from their policies, such as community-based schools for girls, rather than engaging in a process that will force the movement to engage in a policy-making process. Since such a process includes necessarily the ability of members to have different opinions and competitive interests, that will have to be balanced by the leadership. It would bring into question the distinctiveness of the Taliban movement compared to other factions, and the religious character of the endeavour."*[410]

This translated into vastly different applications of policy, with an implicit 'don't ask don't tell' attitude. Intervention in the decisions of provincial governors only took place when the issue would become prominent and could be perceived as a challenge to the leadership. Outside a public debate, provincial governors and local leadership officials could offer lasting agreements that did flourish into functioning programmes, including in the area of education.

Implementation and enforcement of edicts, as well as the general governance of the Taliban, therefore, was highly dependent on individual commanders and government officials, as well as the communities they were implemented in. In his quest to preserve public opinion, Mullah Mohammad Omar reportedly gave instructions forbidding media coverage of activities that could be construed as the Emirate giving in to western interests.[411]

Issues that were discussed in the public realm and that drew attention would draw Mullah Mohammad Omar's attention. While others in the movement advocated

410. Vaux, 2003, 132.

411. This apparently was already the case in 1996, but was cemented in 1998, after the rocket attacks of the United States of America.

gradual change or postponing the addressing of issues, Mullah Mohammad Omar's strict adherence to principle — no matter what the consequences — saw him deal immediately with issues, at times micro-managing seemingly mundane day-to-day issues. This paradoxical mode of governance — how and where decisions were made — was highly influenced by the matter at hand, the personalities involved and the perception of the issue, as well as possible fallout.

The matter of officials associated with the former Communist government was frequently discussed among the senior leadership. Mullah Zaeef's memoir recalls the matter as a point of bitterness, and the order to research the backgrounds of those under his authority was a motivating factor for encouraging him to quit his position.[412] Mullah Mohammad Omar had issued a general order to identify and "punish" Communists and their sympathisers in May 1998, but it took until April 2001 for a large-scale purge to take place.[413] During the latter, some six or seven thousand officials seem to have been dismissed from their positions, including 4-5000 in the Ministry of Defence. These principled decisions had an impact on the Taliban's ability to govern the country, since the upcoming clerical class didn't have the experience or training to handle the bureaucracy.

The Taliban had retained the state system that existed before their capture of Kabul, innovating only in the emphasis they would grant the Supreme Court (see below). They retained the provincial boundaries as drawn and barely increased the number of districts. In 1994, there were 32 provinces and 330 districts; in 1998, there were 32 provinces and 377 districts.[414] Even the change of the state's name in October 1997 didn't alter much; Afghanistan went from a 'republic' to an 'emirate', but this had no effect on state structures. It was implemented mainly to appease requests from the clergy, following Mullah Mohammad Omar's elevation to *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* a little over a year earlier.

The following charts outline the state structures adopted during the Taliban's government.

412. Zaeef, 2010, 90.

413. Editorial team, 1998k; United Nations, 2001a.

414. UNSMA Civil Affairs Unit, 2000, 8.

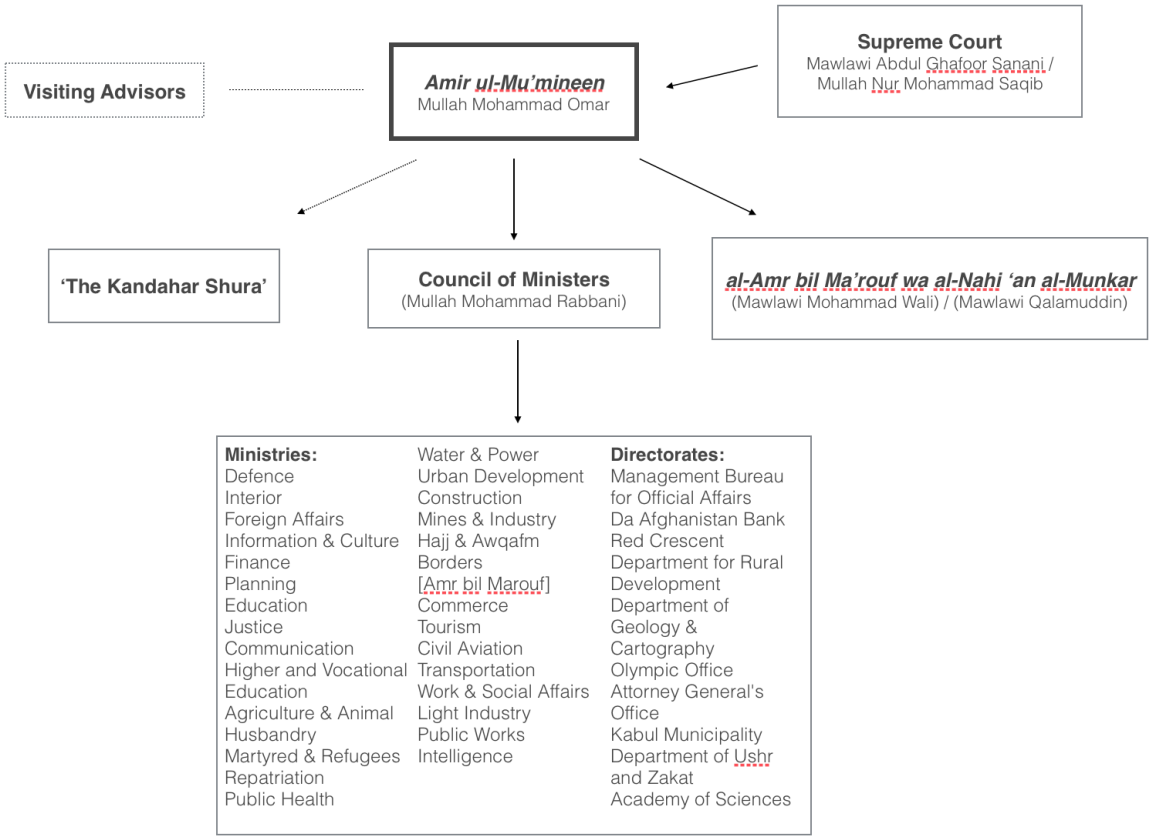

Figure 7: Taliban government structure, 1998-2001

Arrows in figure 7 describe the flow of power. The Supreme Court was in a superior position to Mullah Mohammad Omar in how these state structures are described and outlined in official documents. Visiting advisors are present in this diagram because they played a notable role in certain policy actions, and their power to influence decisions was often greater than that of the Council of Ministers. They had no official part in state structures, however. The forces associated with the *Amr bil Ma'rouf* were, on the one hand, technically subordinate to the Council of Ministers, but they were later also given an independent status outside this ministerial chain of command — thus directly subordinate and reporting to Mullah Mohammad Omar. Contemporary foreign news reports often make reference to 'the Kandahar shura' or 'the Ulemaa' shura', but this seems to have been in reference to informal gatherings of clerics assembled on an ad hoc and in-no-way-formalised manner.[415]

415. Editorial team, 2001r; Imhasly, 2001; Landay, 2001.

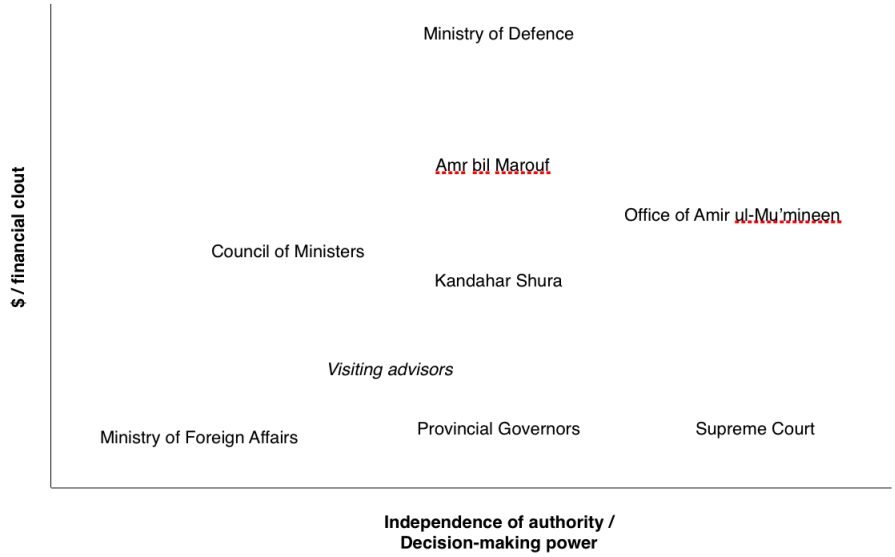

Figure 8: Taliban internal power dynamics, 1998-2001

Figure 8 attempts an outline of who had the power to take decisions as well as to implement them on the ground. In this way, we can note the strength of the Supreme Court in terms of their theoretical decision-making power but their lack of financial resources to enact change around the country. The Ministry of Defence had the largest sums of money flowing through, but they were limited in the areas of society in which they had a say. Commanders had been hand-picked by Mullah Mohammad Omar; some, like Mullah Dadullah, even had their own units and men loyal specifically to them, but these functioned as roving groups sent to tackle specific issues. Note too that there were, of course, exceptions to how this functioned on a day-to-day basis.

(3) *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*

The proclamation of Mullah Mohammad Omar as *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* in April 1996 was an important moment both for the Taliban within Afghanistan as well as for how they were seen by the outside world. The Taliban forces were seemingly stuck outside Kabul, unable to push forward past front lines in Lowgar and resorted to indiscriminate rocket attacks on the city.[416] Around 1,500 scholars from across Afghanistan (and some from Pakistan) came to Kandahar to discuss the Taliban movement's future.[417]

There seems to have been some confusion as to the purposes of the meeting among attendees. One Mullah — Mullah Khudaidad — from eastern Khost said that "we all wondered what Mullah Omar wanted from us. We hadn't been told much except to come to Kandahar."[418] On the third day, the discussion shifted and it was proposed that Mullah Mohammad Omar accept the title of *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*.

This title had previously been applied to Caliphs (like Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman, Ali and Omar bin Abdul Aziz), but many argued that to accept the title wouldn't be to lay claim to any authority over the Muslim world as a whole but rather to finalise and firm up the authority of Mullah Mohammad Omar and his movement and settle a simmering internal debate.[419] In the more recent past, the Afghan leader Dost Mohammad had taken the title in 1837 when he declared *jihad* as a means of drawing the disparate tribes together. Most subsequent leaders took the title, but this seems to have clashed with Amanullah's reform agenda and in 1923 he changed it to *Padshah*.[420] Note, too, that other mujahedeen leaders referred to themselves as *amir*.[421] Outside

416. Ruttig, 1995, 1-2; Murshed, 2006, 49.

417. Interviews, Kandahar and Kabul, June and July 2010; Fergusson, 2011, 26.

418. Gannon, 2006, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 553.

419. Note, they had not yet changed the name of the movement to the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.' That would happen on October 26, 1997, albeit as a consequence of Mullah Mohammad Omar's new title.

420. "King", though the government was only changed to a 'Kingdom' in 1926 (Sungur, 2013, 46).

421. Massoud and Ismael Khan, for example.

Afghanistan, the Sultan of Sokoto claims the title, as has the King of Morocco since 1996.

Interviewees confirmed that the purpose of the title was to reinforce Mullah Mohammad Omar's claim to authority and to firm up his Islamic credentials for possible outside observers. One former mujahed who had fought on the Taliban fronts and who was present for the discussions characterised their intention as follows:

> *"The Ulemaa wanted to make the territory strong and the leadership strong; nothing else. They wanted to sanction the Rabbani government as illegal and to give the power to the Taliban government and make it legal. They wanted to give the Taliban government Islamic sanction as well as an Islamic name."*[422]

Another echoed this with a different slant suggesting that a settlement of the leadership issue was more important for local people than the national perspective:

> *"And the common people were happy because this was the sign of security and stability for next time. When the conflicts finished it meant the chance of fighting and instability finished."*[423]

Another Taliban official stated that the title was given simply to clear up challenges to Mullah Mohammad Omar's leadership and to smooth out internal conflict:

> *"A decision was taken to hold this meeting and gather together the Mullahs in order to prevent conflicts among the Taliban over the leadership. There had been some in the past, so we gathered together the Ulemaa' to make a final decision over the leadership and to prevent these conflicts for the future. […] In the end, things worked out because we didn't have any such problems or internal conflicts over this matter in the future."*[424]

The appointment was mostly designed to solve internal rivalries and clearly demonstrate to the followers not only the indisputable leadership of Mullah

422. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

423. Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.

424. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

Mohammed Omar but also the universal nature of the movement that transcended Afghanistan's tribal and ethnic divisions. The appointment propagated this very message by making clear that the legitimacy of the movement and its leadership was derived from Islam and stood in the tradition of the caliphates that had ruled over a great many people and countries. It is also likely that instead of regarding his appointment as a claim to rule over each and every Muslim, as represented by the umma, the aim was rather to rally support from Muslim nations to clearly show the Islamic nature of the movement and its groundedness within Islamic history in an attempt to reach out.[425]

While internal disputes continued under the surface, Mullah Mohammad Omar remained the leader of the Taliban and his appointment as *Amir al-Mu'mineen* consolidated the movement behind his leadership. In this way, it was also intended as an affront to Burhanuddin Rabbani and his government, a way to once and for all challenge his legitimacy as a ruler and move forward without him.[426]

In some ways, it was not a huge leap to take the title. *The News International*, a Pakistani newspaper, had already referred to him as such in January 1995. In June 1995, *Tolo-ye Afghan* newspaper published an editorial entitled "Who should be the caliph and what should he do?", listing the ways a new caliph could be installed and some of his characteristics.[427]

The transcript of a speech made by Mawlana Moinuddin Abu Fazl at Eid ul-Fitr in February 1998 entitled "The responsibilities of an Emir and his officials in Islamic Sharia" lists nine responsibilities that are shouldered by the amir in an Islamic system:

> *"1 - Obeying the religious laws*
>
> *2 - The implementation of sharia law in order to protect society from corruption and cruelties.*

425. Two interviewees stated that the title was only applicable to Afghanistan, and was not about assuming the leadership of the entire Muslim community or umma. (Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, July 2010).

426. Interviewees indicated that discussions to make the shift to *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* earlier in 1996, initiated by Mullah Ehsanullah Ehsan for specifically this reason.

427. Editorial team, 1995i.

3 - Bringing complete peace, so the people of our country can travel back and forth for their businesses without any issues.

4 - The implementation of the rule of sharia for the purpose of the protection of the rights of the people.

5 - The protection of borders and territory so long as there is danger from enemies.

6 - The collection of revenues to the national treasury which will be used for the development of society and for the betterment of the people.

7 - The usage of funds from the national treasury for the needy, and solving the problems of the people.

8 - The selection of pious leaders and experienced personalities for all the government positions.

9 - The supervision of all the position holders and analysing their day-to-day work."[428]

It is important to note, too, that the relationship between *amir* and the people functioned somewhat contractually. The article continues with a list of responsibilities that fall on the people, so long as the *amir* fulfils his obligations. Thus, "as long as he abides by the Islamic Sharia law, he should remain as the Emir of the state or country."

(4) Courts and the justice sector

There were three levels of courts in the Taliban's government: primary or *ibtidai*, secondary or *murafi'a* / *imtiaz,* and the Supreme or highest level court.[429] One of the earliest actions was to impose high standards for becoming part of the judiciary, given how important the idea of justice was to their approach:

"All the judges that were appointed had to have graduated from Islamic institutions, and needed to be verified in the Hanafi shari'a school of law and its principles. They also were required to be able to distinguish between weak and strong points of Islamic jurisprudence. All judges were to set an example themselves in spirit and appearance, and should not have been accused of any crimes, and not be addicted to drugs. These were the key criteria every judge needed to pass, but even the Taliban with their highest aspirations contained individuals whose standards fell short of what they should have been."[430]

428. Abu Fazl, 1998a; Abu Fazl, 1998b.

429. These were inherited from the already-extant justice system. The Taliban were not innovators in this respect.

430. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban.

The main drive of the senior leadership seems to have been an attempt to foreground the *shari'a* and religious law as the primary source of law, rather than statutory laws that had gradually become the main legal source in the years since Amanullah's 1923 constitution.[431]

The role that the Supreme Court played was a key formal innovation carried out by the Taliban. As noted previously, this was connected with the need for a judicial check on the executive branch of government. Mawlawi Abdul Ghafoor Sanani was appointed Chief Justice following the fall of Kabul in 1996. He had previously headed the shura of clerics in Kandahar.[432] He was transferred back to the Ulemaa shura as well as to the directorship of the *fatwa* office in March 1998, succeeded by Mullah Nur Mohammad Saqib. Saqib remained in the position until the end of the Taliban's government.[433]

Figure 7 (above) shows how the Supreme Court was separate from the Council of Ministers.[434] The Justice Ministry, headed by Nuruddin Turabi, thus operated separately from the Supreme Court, though there were rumours in June 2001 that he had designs on Saqib's position following allegations of corruption that plagued the judicial sector.[435] Other legal figures featured in the Taliban system, often without formal positions. Such was the case with Mawlawi Abdul Ali Deobandi who operated in senior justice circles post-1998, but as of April 2001 had no title or position within the Taliban's government.[436]

(Author's copy).

431. Ahmad *et al.*, 2011.

432. Azami, 2015, 214.

433. Editorial team, 1998i.

434. "*Amir ul-Mu'mineen* issued a decree establishing the supreme court as an independent judicial organ, and declared the Mohammadi *shari'a* as law. The part of the former constitution that addressed the judiciary was abandoned because the *shari'a* and the Qu'ran did not need the support of a document like this. The constitution from the reign of Zahir Shah was used to manage the affairs of other departments and administrations within the government, all so long as they did not clash with the *shari'a*." (This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban (Author's copy)).

435. United Nations, 2001c.

436. Editorial team, 2001p.

Mullah Mohammad Omar was responsible for picking Supreme Court judges, and they, in turn, had been assigned the authority to appoint and dismiss judges around the country in July 1997.[437] Supreme Court judges were given some basic duties such as announcing the sighting of the moon and thus the end of the *ramadan* fasting month.[438] Otherwise they examined legal appeals and special matters assigned specifically by Mullah Mohammad Omar. In this way, some flashpoints of the later years passed through the offices of the Supreme Court. In 1998, they were assigned the case of bin Laden for which they requested evidence be submitted by foreign governments. (None was submitted, even after several extensions of the final date).[439] In February 2000, an executive order issued by Mullah Mohammad Omar reaffirmed the independent status of the Supreme Court:

> *"The judicial body of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has the status of an executive body, like the government and all other bodies, and is an independent element of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which deals with its relevant affairs itself and submits its reports solely to the supreme body of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."*[440]

By April 2001, a new court was established in Kandahar, however, whose functions seemed to overlap with that of the Supreme Court.[441] It is unclear why this decision was taken. Around that time, there was discussion over the matter of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan and whether to destroy them. We will return to this in more detail below, but for now suffice it to note that the matter was referred to the Supreme Court for the final decision.[442] The Supreme Court seems to have functioned as a clearing house for Mullah Mohammad Omar's most difficult problems. It seems that he was able to shape the decisions of the office, but one can speculate that delegating those decisions to another office was a way of avoiding personal responsibility for certain

437. Editorial team, 1997n.

438. Editorial team, 2000j; Editorial team, 2000n.

439. Editorial team, 1998g; Editorial team, 1999b.

440. Omar, 2000b.

441. Herat, 2001.

442. They voted to destroy the statues.

matters, and perhaps thus of increasing the perceived legitimacy of any decisions thus taken.[443]

(5) *Al-Amr bil Ma'rouf wa al-Nahi 'an al-Munkar*

The group called *al-Amr bil Ma'rouf wa al-Nahi 'an al-Munkar* ("commanding right and forbidding wrong") was active in Taliban territories from the beginning in an informal sense but was promoted to the level of a ministry in early 1996.[444] The *Amr bil Marouf* forces were both the manifestation and implementors of the Taliban's moral drive, described above. It became to be considered the first line of defence in the protection of the nation's identity. In an editorial in *Ettefaq-e Islam* newspaper entitled "Taleban regret influence of 'alien culture' on Afghan youths", the ministry was seen as protecting the young:

> *"This form of offensive by the enemy against our nation is very dangerous. It is therefore necessary for all our ulema religious scholars , spiritual leaders, elders, intellectuals and enlightened students to extend every sort of co-operation to the officials of the Ministry for the Prohibition of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue. By doing so, they would have accomplished their faithful duty in helping towards the eradication of the newly penetrated roots of sedition and corruption."*[445]

Just as the Taliban's reliance on legalistic solutions to the nation's problems should come as no surprise, so it is with their use of the institution of *Amr bil Marouf*. It was a pre-made group with which they had familiarity, historically as well as culturally. It was an institution that came pre-loaded, so to speak, in their heritage and its use had resonance for them and the world in which they were acting.

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443. More research on the precise workings of the judiciary is needed.

444. There is some confusion in the sources as to when this happened. A Dawn newspaper article cited in Kleiner, 2000, 27, states that the change happened in May, but an article in *Shariat* newspaper (Editorial team, 1996a) stated that the group would now be operating across the country under the official imprimatur of the government.

445. Editorial team, 2001t.

The elevation of the group to the level of a ministry and allocation of resources and power to their officials was unique to the Taliban, but the institution itself was not. A Qur'anic precedent exists which specifies some general functions for those who carry out the phrase, and this was supplemented through details present in the main collections of hadith.[446] The injunction came later to be associated with the with the term *hisba* and the active particle (the person who does the thing), *muhtasib*.[447] *Hisba* referred to 'reckoning' or 'accounting', or preventing things from happening and thus preventing the need for court proceedings. The term dates to Mawardi in the eleventh century and his *Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* ("Ordinances of Governance") in which he associates *hisba* with the idea of *Amr bil Marouf*.[448] The person who would carry out this duty, therefore, was called a *muhtasib*. The Afghan king Abd ul-Rahman used *muhtasib*s as part of his state apparatus; they carried out much the same tasks as the Taliban had them doing, a sort of supplementary police force with a certain focus on moral infringements.[449]

Note, too, the precedent from the 1980s and early 1990s, when mujahedeen fronts and large militias associated with the mujahedeen would have their own *Amr bil Marouf* groups. Rabbani, Massoud and Hekmatyar operated versions of such groups on fronts associated with them, and the mujahedeen government that took power after the fall of Najib in 1992 attempted to set it up as an official state structure.[450] In Herat, during the early 1990s the main mujahedeen figure, Ismael Khan, actually managed to install his own *Amr bil Marouf* enforcers, restricting the use of amplification of music as well as the specific lyrics that could be sung by musicians.[451] In the northeastern province of Badakhshan during the same period, mujahedeen commanders and local Mullahs censored music and dance in the area.[452] The Taliban fronts in southern Afghanistan also had instances of this institution, as has been described in the writings of

446. The Qur'anic verses mentioning the phrase are 3:110, 3:114, 7:157, 9:71, 9:112, 22:41 and 31:17. See Cook, 2003, 13, but any discussion of *Amr bil Marouf* must also reference Cook, 2000.

447. Martin, 2004, 306.

448. Martin, 2004, 306.

449. Kakar, 1979, 53-56.

450. Baily, 2009, 154.

451. He attempted to revive this group in 2002 (Struck, 2002).

452. Baily, 2009, 159.

members as well as in interviews.[453] There is also a model and precedent in Saudi Arabia's Ministry of the same name/function, whose founding laws voice the same basic principles that the Taliban expressed.[454]

Amr bil Marouf had an ideological function as well as one that was purely for the sake of enforcement. They were entrusted with the ideological shaping of government employees, through training sessions offered to staff and soldiers around the country.[455] It also functioned as a kind of internal security force for the Taliban.[456] This broad authority meant that they were involved in a wide spread of activities, from encouraging people to attend prayers to conducting raids as a kind of counter-narcotics task force.[457] They also operated facilities for the rehabilitation of drug users.[458] A written account by a senior member of the Taliban administration notes that:

> *"The Ministry made sure that the people obeyed the religious orders and did not commit any sinful actions. The Ministry was responsible for men and women alike, since both have their place and responsibilities in society. In this way, women had to observe the hejab; avoid strolling, idle chatting or talking with men who did not belong to their family; and they had to be accompanied by a male family member or mahram while traveling and so forth. The Ministry also took care of issues like narcotics, harmful drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, hashish, opium and heroin; all these were banned. Gambling, bribery, music and adultery were also forbidden."*[459]

453. Agha, 2014, 23.

454. "Regulation of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice", issued September 6, 1980. (Author's copy / translation).

455. See, for example, Editorial team, 2001g or the various rules relating to this described in Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001.

456. The rise of the *Amr bil Marouf* within the Taliban as an internal security force has an interesting parallel in the government of Saddam Hussein, who began training Sunni and Shi'i militia forces in 1994 to protect his position as leader. The *Fedayeen Saddam* were mostly concentrated in the south of Iraq and religious fanaticism seems to have been encouraged (Orton, 2015). Some interviewees noted a broad similarity, too, between the forces of the *amr bil marouf* and other 'enforcers' employed by previous militias and ruling groups in Kabul.

457. Editorial team, 2001f; Editorial team, 2000d.

458. Editorial team, 2001h.

459. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

The ministry operated outside the control of the main council of ministers operating in Kabul and answered only to Mullah Mohammad Omar. This gave it the flexibility to tackle the wide range of tasks allocated to it, though it also meant that it was largely unaccountable. The large number of laws addressed to the ministry by Mullah Mohammad Omar, increasing in number in the years just before 2001, indicates a rising frustration with this lack of accountability, even from the senior Kandahari leadership.

Its goals accommodated the desires of some senior leaders to thoroughly reform society and reshape it. One senior member noted that

> *"The [Amr bil Marouf] Ministry was an institution that set out to reform the administration and society, to change them physically and spiritually and to rid them of corruption."*[460]

Note how aspirational the goals were, how devoid of quantifiable measures. This helps explain how they grew to be so powerful within the Taliban administration, and why their mandate seemed to shift so often. To this end, we can compare comments made by senior officials in 1995 and 1998 in government-run newspapers:

> May 1995*: "Our department has been established so that we can make sure that the law of Allah and the word of the Koran is completely and truly implemented on Allah's land. Also it is our duty and obligation to stop all sorts of illegal and immoral activities among Muslims. These include the use of drugs such as hashish and heroin. It also includes stopping people from indulging in corruption and other vulgar and immoral activities. We have our law and regulations which stop people from theft, robbery, usurping other's rights and causing all kinds of troubles in the society. We have also published pamphlets explaining how a practicing and believing Muslim should spend his life. We engage with mosques and madrassas and make sure that people keep up with their daily religious obligations and stay on the right path."*[461]

> September 1998*: "Tremendous efforts were made to remove all those bad things from our society which were made common by the regimes of the past. Instead of this we tried to strengthen the moral foundations of the society and synthesise the life of our people in accordance to the principles of the Islamic Shari'a laws of Prophet Muhammad. Luckily the*

460. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

461. Editorial team, 1995b.

faithful people of Afghanistan have fully coordinated with us in the implementation of these principles. Because they have waged jihad on the cost of one and a half million martyrs and other many sacrifices for the sake of the realisation of their ideals. After their effective participation and full coordination we are successful in our mission. The faithful people of our country are witness of the fact that due to the striking and brilliant achievements of the Islamic Emirate, now our society is advancing towards a complete and exemplary Islamic system."[462]

The emphasis on societal change was initially focused on the individual, seeking to effect specific behaviours and actions, but within a few years it had grown broader in emphasis to the level of ideals and systems. This change is also reflected in the fact that the group was converted into a full-fledged ministry in early 1996.

The *Amr bil Marouf* developed a reputation for severity and inflexibility early on, and some pieces of internal legislation were drafted in an attempt to get their officials to take a "softer" approach. An editorial published in Herat's *Ettefaq-e Islam* newspaper in December 1999, for example, is headlined: "We should use soft language while enforcing the promotion of virtue."[463]

Indeed, Herat seems to have been a focal point of tensions between the governor's office and the *Amr bil Marouf* forces. The governor, Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, issued public reprimands following a raid on a hospital in which the beards of patients and staff were forcibly trimmed.[464] Mullah Mohammad Omar himself acknowledged these deficiencies in the ministry on several occasions, making efforts to curb beatings, for example in February 2001.[465] Three months later he noted that they represented "a very harmful flaw" and that it was "very dangerous for the Islamic system and causes the dislike of God."[466]

While the Taliban movement struggled with the precise way to implement the instruction to 'command right and forbid wrong', all those involved in the government note that it was an important duty and a key part of how they envisioned their role in society. In this way, we can see the tension between the practicalities of rule and their

462. Editorial team, 1998d.

463. Editorial team, 1999e.

464. Clark, 2012.

465. Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 4506-4512.

466. Omar, 2001a.

ideological agenda. Finding a balance between these two would occupy the leadership until the very end.

(v) Constitutional Commission

The Constitutional Commission was the Taliban's response to the question of the nature of their state. External actors had, following Mullah Mohammad Omar's appointment as *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*, offered advice as to the various directions this could take. A Pakistani religious political party close to the Taliban — the Jamiat-e-Ulemaa-Islam under Maulana Fazlur Rehman— even drafted a constitution for the Taliban to use in October 1996, reportedly following a request from Mullah Mohammad Omar.[467] By June next year, the head of the Supreme Court, Nur Mohammad Saqib, told one journalist that the Taliban had no need for a constitution, "because Shari'ah is the only constitution."[468] Indeed, the refrain that the Qur'an and/or *shari'a* could function as a constitution was repeated in the Taliban media throughout their years in power."[469] An October 1997 news report states that the Ministry of Justice had recently started work on the constitutional review, but it seems this was an independent attempt from what became the official constitutional commission.[470]

Mullah Mohammad Omar issued a decree on June 20, 1998, in which he tasked Nur Mohammad Saqib (the Chief Justice) and the Supreme Court with reviewing the terms of the constitution (along with all other laws). As per the revised constitution, they began their work the next month:

> *"On the first days, the work was on the basic law where the basic laws of Afghanistan in different governmental eras and different situations were demonstrated before the honourable clergies. All articles of the law were discussed in detail, based on the Islamic Sharia's fundamentals and laws. Articles which match the Islamic Sharia were approved; as for other articles that do not match the Sharia or the Islamic denomination, they were modified or*

467. Editorial team, 1996b.

468. Rashid, 2010, 107.

469. June 1995: "The constitution of the Islamic movement of the Taliban is the Koran." (Editorial team, 1995h); January 2001: "our constitution is Islam" (Editorial team, 2001k).

470. Editorial team, 1997i.

completely deleted. In some sources, new legitimate articles were included based on requirements."[471]

They were still busy preparing the new document in May 1999, and in fact had never formally issued the completed draft for official approval by the time their government fell in late 2001.[472] The full text offers an interesting historical glimpse into the Taliban's thinking about the nature of the state, the role of the judiciary and other related issues as conceptualised towards the final years of their rule.

The 1964 constitution and that drafted by the post-1992 interim mujahedeen government formed the basis for the Taliban's efforts, and it is interesting to note how many similarities exist. Centralisation remains a key point of emphasis for the Taliban, as in the 1964 version; there is little leeway given to anything that might lead to fragmentation or too much independence from the decrees of the central government and its leadership. Despite a good deal of renaming of terms and positions, the Taliban's constitution also has a broadly similar vision of the key institutions of the modern Afghan state: a strong leader, a strong Supreme Court appointed by the leader, and a council of ministers to run the ministries. Many articles in the Taliban's document make reference to a general principle whereby everything "must conform to *shari'a* principles." In this way, the drafters of the document left certain offices or articles vague and subject to interpretation by the judiciary and leadership. They also made reference to particular documents (like an Education Law) that in some cases didn't yet exist or hadn't been formally approved. The repeated statement that so-and-so was valid "except when it is in contradiction to the Islamic *shari'a*" was presumably a safeguard allowing flexibility to the judiciary and to Mullah Mohammad Omar in taking decisions. One area which the constitutional draft is notably vague is as to the manner of appointing or installing the leader or *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*. This may have

471. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2010a.

472. Note that the constitution document has had an interesting life post-2001, issued and 'approved' by a long list of signatories in 2005, but later removed from their own website in March 2010 after worries over its sensitivity to ongoing political negotiations with the Afghan government and international partners. It has periodically been resurrected by foreign journalists who "discover" the document, though no changes have been made. The Taliban's formal set of rules have also since been taken up by a document entitled the *layeha*, of which several permutations have been issued in recent years.

been a concession to the fact that there is considerable debate in Islamic political thought over this question, or this may simply have been an oversight.

Discussions about the Taliban's system of government often end up questioning the extent to which the movement sought to be opaque in their dealings. Dorronsoro writes that:

> *"An informant in Kabul in 2000, who was himself a judge and an alem, verified that information on the workings of the Taliban government was unavailable except to a few hundred Taliban ulema."*[473]

It is tempting to think that it is enough to describe the Taliban as somehow naturally secretive. Mullah Mohammad Omar's refusal to appear in photographs is perhaps an example. Yet this explanation fails to acknowledge the fact that the Taliban did seek to specify and outline the nature of their government. This happened gradually and in a piecemeal fashion, to be sure, but there were efforts to formalise the nature of the state as they settled into the reality of their being in control of most of the territory of the Afghan state.

We should also remember that in many ways the Taliban's system was process- and value-oriented rather than one that held specific goals at its core. The idea that if they were just able to conquer the whole physical territory of the country, eliminate corruption and get all the citizens under their control to behave according to the *shari'a* seems to have been common among certain parts of the leadership.[474] In this way, the precise details of government may have been less important to them than we might think.

In the end, the reality was somewhere in between the two positions, and ultimately the unexpected fall from power in 2001 deprived them (and us, as observers) of following these courses to their logical conclusions.

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473. Dorronsoro, 2005, 274.

474. Rabbani, 1997b.

(b) Cultural policy

> *"It was necessary that our poets used their talent in service of their religion and nation and stand up to their Islamic and human mission. They should reflect the unfulfilled wishes of the martyrs, sighs of widows and cries of orphans in their poems. Today's poets should take their minds away from natural views, mountain bottoms, riversides and imaginary flying and draw a picture of their nation's pains and ruined country in their poems, and introduce the traitors of religion and the homeland to our people. With this condition, the Islamic government opens its bosom to encourage culture."*[475]

The Taliban's cultural policy was wide-ranging and their attempts to mould the nation's cultural activities and output extensive. Much of this impulse came from the moral conviction derived, to a large extent, from their education. This brief overview of some of the ways the Taliban sought to influence and control culture seeks to understand their attitude towards culture using statements and justifications issued or written at the time. It covers aspects of culture that the Taliban sought to remove as well as those that the government and leadership supported and sought to encourage.

'Culture' was one of the key battlegrounds for the Taliban both pre- and post-2001. 'True' or 'authentic' Afghan culture — it was usually described as such[476] — was a key distinguishing and differentiating factor for the movement. For a group that was so internationally derided for its acts against Afghan culture, it is easy to forget how important it was to them, albeit on their terms.

(i) Culture's role

The educational and cultural background of the Taliban's senior leadership predisposed them towards certain genres and forms, of which oral culture seems to have been the preferred type. They had studied the great Persian poetry as part of their Deobandi curriculum, and the great storytellers of the Arabic-speaking world were

475. Editorial team, 1997k.

476. E.g. "During the meeting the minister of culture and information and the deputy head of cultural activities talked about the importance of the society for the promotion of art and culture. They also demanded from the participants to enhance their efforts for the promotion of the real and original culture of the country and prevent all kinds of foreign cultural influences." (Editorial team, 2001b).

also covered.[477] The concept of *adab* and a culture being permeated through its literature was one that had great resonance for the Taliban.[478]

Adab can loosely be translated as 'literature', but it is also a way of behaviour, a way of interacting with others, and a means of distinguishing between those who had received a full education and those who hadn't. Senior figures felt an immense amount of pride in the literature of both the region as well as that of their Islamic heritage, mostly written in Arabic. A series of articles published in Tolo-ye Afghan in April 2001 by Ghulam Mustafa Hilaman reveal this sense that the cultural output of a nation makes visible its values and moral worth.[479]

Cultural protection, for the Taliban, therefore, became akin to the protection of the physical territory of the nation. Statements and assessments of the threat that outside culture posed to the Afghan people became increasingly alarmist as the years progressed.

> March 2001*: "The youth are never given a chance to understand that they are pushed towards an abyss. The secret of the great conquerors was that they kept away from the glamour of wealth and women and avoided the sessions of singing and dancing. They always remained united in their struggle against the enemies of humanity. That is why they were always successful in the protection of their homeland."*[480]

> June 2001*: "The aim behind such an improper attitude by the United States, and at its instigation the United Nations, is to force the people of Afghanistan to desist from the establishment and implementation of the Islamic order. They want the people of Afghanistan to accept what would be in complete contradiction with the Islamic laws and Afghan traditions and which would represent the so called values of the naked culture of the Western world."*[481]

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477. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012b, xxxv.

478. Note, too, how the word 'culture' in English was not originally used as a reference to learning or aesthetic products but rather the taming of wild spaces of nature through 'cultivation'. ("The second range of meanings goes back to the early sixteenth century. It was originally figurative: as the soil is improved and made productive by tillage, so the mind and manners may be improved by education and training. The word is thus removed from the earth and linked to the advance of society. It is, if you will, removed from the country to the city – cultivation comes to mean civility, a word which has its root in the Latin civilis, meaning 'of, or pertaining to, the city'.") See chapter 1 of Bate, 2002 for more.

479. Hilaman, 2001.

480. Himat, 2001.

481. Editorial team, 2001q.

This view of culture as part of the battleground where the movement was confronted with the false and malicious policies of the outside world gave a sense that international aggression was as much about this cultural clash as any perceived ambition to steal Afghanistan's resources:

> *"Russians and their puppets not only were after our country's mines underground wealth, but also were after removing Islamic belief and culture from our minds and many of the Muslim believers and cultural people who opposed their false belief were put in the hell-like prison of Pol-e-Charkhi."*[482]

The protection of Afghan minds thus became to be seen as one of the key roles that the Taliban could play at the national level through policy.[483] One of the first aspects of this policy drive was seeking to reform education policy from these outside influences. An April 2001 editorial in Herat's *Ettefaq-i Islam* outlined how this outside influence had affected the country's curricula:

> *"The infidel world was well aware of the fact that the people of Afghanistan strongly believed in Islam and, based on this belief, were ready for full action, too. It was therefore that before every thing else the infidels embarked upon the elimination of the educational curriculum of this country and the exploitation and colonisation of its culture. They succeeded in fact in the introduction of such an educational curriculum in Afghanistan in which religious education had been placed by training in music and dance. All this was planned and carried out by the former Soviet Union with the help of its domestic servants. And their aim was to make the people of Afghanistan to come step by step under the influence of Western culture and thus forget about and give up their own pure culture, values, gains and glittering history."*[484]

In March 2000, Mullah Mohammad Omar took the occasion of International Women's Day to publish comments on this influence of foreign culture:

> *"My demand is that by protecting your piety, dignity, and high status with patience, sobriety, and tolerance, you should put dirt in the mouths of the infidels and bury their dirty and foul-*

482. Editorial team, 1997k.

483. "Let's purify our mentalities and brains from the impacts of materialism and western culture and as true faithful Muslims give proper regard to the religion of God Almighty." (Editorial team, 2001e).

484. Editorial team, 2001o.

smelling culture in a grave of rejection forever. Rear the new generation in such a manner that they are pious Muslims, clever, intelligent and honourable Afghans."[485]

This short extract reveals how there was considerable overlap regarding what the correct kind of culture was: somewhere in-between Islamic and Afghan, the precise limits of which were defined by the Taliban themselves. Thus certain parts of 'Afghan culture' as many citizens would recognise it were banned, and others encouraged or simply left without censure. The Taliban's policies towards these national cultural practices had a somewhat haphazard quality to their application: there doesn't appear to have been that much systematic thought given how lists of banned elements are composed seemingly at random.

This desire for cultural purification of society, as was discussed above, was expressed through the injunction to hold "the shari'a" above all else. Thus, an editorial following the destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan ran:

"Probably all Muslims strongly believe that on the day of judgement regarding the issue of statues, God will give no importance to the arguments of politics, UNESCO, historical heritage and so on. Moreover, all Muslims know that the decision about the statues' destruction is based on the principle of shari'a."[486]

This gave the Taliban flexibility in their application of cultural policy. The absence of a rule did not necessarily mean that something was permitted. Instead, as we have already seen was the case for how the constitution was drafted, vagueness and catch-all injunctions to 'conform in all other respects to the shari'a' meant that administrators of the laws were given considerable freedom in their interpretation.

485. Omar, 2000a.

486. Editorial team, 2001e.

(ii) Moral drive

On a national level, policy decisions were both proscriptive and prescriptive. This conformed to the pattern of the general injunction to 'command right and forbid wrong', the foundation of the *Amr bil Marouf* group who were, in any case, the main enforcers for these policies. The reasoning behind these policies was always explained as part of the rulings taken, but the broad justification was always a sense that the leadership's role was to guide the nation out of poor behaviours and customs. Thus, in the words of one senior Taliban figure looking back on the years in power:

> *"The Taliban addressed all these matters and others with the belief that they should help to reform society and its people. The movement had taken control and were trying to lead the people out of the depravity of the past years. The Taliban felt responsible to guide them onto the right path."*[487]

All sorts of things were banned during the Taliban years in a series of edicts issued by Mullah Mohammad Omar or by the Council of Ministers under Mullah Mohammad Rabbani. Alcohol and other intoxicants were of course banned, though this was to some extent part of the unwritten policy of the previous mujahedeen government as well. Cigarettes were initially banned in government offices, then across the country although enforcement seems to have been weakly applied and the policy was unsuccessful. This ban on cigarettes and tobacco was initially proposed by the *Amr bil Marouf* department, and then received support from the Supreme Court, and later from Mullah Mohammad Omar's office.[488] This illustrates how policy was not always developed in the power centres but, particularly in the case of 'cultural' matters, often in off-centre poles.

Games involving fighting between animals were prohibited for two broad reasons:

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487. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

488. Azami, 2015, 211-212; Unpublished manuscript written by a former senior Taliban leader (author's copy).

1) *"it was regarded as cruel to force animals to fight each other for the entertainment of men, given that animals also feel pain"*

2) *"the fights were often used to gamble. Gambling is illegal in Islam and specifically forbidden by the Qu'ran."*[489]

The injunction against gambling came to cover a broad range of games, and this may help explain the way lists of banned sports and games have the feeling of a brainstorming session at the ministry rather than a something that was more systematically ordered and evaluated.[490]

In almost all cases, the Taliban regarded themselves paternally, as if their education in moral rectitude gave them a better understanding of the vices which many suffered from. It fed into their sense that removing these vices would somehow translate into a richer and more moral society overall.

A July 2000 ban on women working in foreign NGOs, for example, was characterised as having been imposed to protect Afghan women from the predations of foreign nationals:

"There is information and complaints that the employment of female staff in foreign and non-Emirate organizations has opened the way for prostitution, which has begun and still continues. However, under the current circumstances it is difficult to pursue and stop such an act. This act effects badly humanity and the Afghan culture."[491]

Similarly with the ban on kite-flying, this was seen as a way to protect Afghan citizens. As the core legislation for the *Amr bil Marouf* group explains:

489. This is excerpted from an unpublished document written by a former senior leader of the Taliban. (Author's copy).

490. Other common games that fell under the bans included chess, kite-flying and an egg-breaking game practiced in certain parts of the country.

491. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 66.

"The personnel for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice shall explain to the public the harm of kites [and kite flying] such as wasteful spending, death, deprivation of education, and looking into others' houses, etc."[492]

(iii) Music

The 'ban on music' that the Taliban are known for having imposed — especially from 1996 onwards — was not a ban on all music. In the words of the well-known scholar, John Baily, this was about "competition between different kinds of music."[493] They were opposed to the use of instruments, and permitted only the daff or da'ira frame drum. Thus, unaccompanied folk song was still permitted, as were the monophonic but melodic intonations of poetry.

From an Islamic perspective, there are several competing strands of argumentation which has, accordingly, seen the marker of consensus move both ways in previous centuries. There is no explicit mention or instruction regarding music in the Qur'an itself, but the hadith collections do have some reports that comment on the use of music.[494] Different communities have interpreted these sources of evidence in different ways. The Taliban represent one of these, informed as they were by the Deobandi tradition they had absorbed through their education, but also by their attempts to project their Islamic experiment outwards to the wider Muslim world.

This was also not the first time music and the arts had been censored in recent Afghan history. During the 1980s, the Soviet-backed Taraki government manipulated artists, musicians and poets in the service of the state; they were forced to perform and produce material suitable for broadcast and use as propaganda against the 'religious reactionaries.'[495] In turn, the mujahedeen fighters targeted those singing for the government.[496] The Rabbani government that took power following Najibullah's fall imposed strict measures. Musicians were forced to apply for licenses, and when

492. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 3.
493. Baily and Korpe, 2009.
494. Martin, 2004, 492-496; al-Faruqi, 1985.
495. Baily, 2009, 148.
496. Baily, 2009, 152.

Hekmatyar was appointed Prime Minister he closed Kabul's cinemas and banned music on radio and television. This came after Rabbani's government as a whole attempted to set up an *Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi 'an al-Munkar* institution.[497] In Herat, during the early 1990s the main mujahedeen figure, Ismael Khan, actually managed to install his own Amr bil Marouf enforcers, restricting the use of amplification of music as well as the specific lyrics that could be sung by musicians.[498] In the northeastern province of Badakhshan during the same period, mujahedeen commanders and local Mullahs censored music and dance in the area.[499]

The Taliban government sought to impose their own standards and rules. Instruments were not to be used, cassettes with songs were forbidden, and the tarana became the main aesthetic product associated with the movement. Musicians were forced to sing these over the national radio. One example related by Baily has Nairiz, a radio singer in Kabul, agreeing to sing such an anthem. He chose specific lyrics, however, which he said the audience understood properly but the Taliban failed to decipher:

> *"Remember the poor are protected by God*
> *One day He will answer their cries*
> *And their oppressors will be punished."*[500]

Saraji and Faqir Mohammad Darwish were two of the best-known singers of tarana during the 1990s. Saraji cited the subject matter of the lyrics as reasons for their appeal among Afghans:

> *"From my experience, the taranas always have profound effects in our society, because the singers often use poems that talk about pride, the motherland, defending the country and the defeat of foreigners in the past."*[501]

497. Baily, 2009, 154.
498. Baily, 2009, 153.
499. Baily, 2009, 159.
500. Baily, 2009, 157. See also: Goldberg, 1998.
501. Atal, 2011.

The ban on musicians and musical instruments was most keenly felt by those living in the big cities with long-standing cultural traditions and practitioners. In Herat, in one case, the Taliban carried out a burning of instruments, citing the following hadith: "Those who listen to music and songs in this world, will on the Day of Judgement have molten lead poured into their ears."[502]

Music has both a long history and a significant following in Afghanistan so it was not easy for the Taliban to impose this ban. In December 1996, the *Amr bil Marouf* released the following to Kabul residents:

> *"To prevent music. To be broadcasted by the public information resources. In shops, hotels, vehicles and rickshaws cassettes and music are prohibited. This matter should be monitored within five days. If any music cassettes [are] found in a shop, the shopkeeper should be imprisoned and the shop locked. If five people guarantee the shop should be opened the criminal released later. If cassette found in the vehicle, the vehicle and the driver will be imprisoned. If five people guarantee the vehicle will be released and the criminal released later."*[503]

Even towards the end of their rule, they were still issuing similar decrees. An order from Mullah Mohammad Omar dated May 1999 addressed what was seen as a problem of music being played in the Taliban's own official vehicles:

> *"The officials of the Amr bil Marouf wa Nahi 'an al-Munkar in the entire country are charged with the duty to inspect the Emirate's vehicles. If cassettes of music and songs are found, the vehicle in question shall be seized and be handed over to the office of the Emirate."*[504]

Despite these formal edicts, Mullah Mohammad Omar himself seems to have enjoyed music, song and poetry. Reports of this predilection come from interviews with those close to him during the 1980s and when he was leader of the Taliban. Saraji was a particular favourite:

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502. Baily, 2009, 155-156; the hadith itself is taken from the collection of Ibn Hajar Haytami.

503. Rashid, 2010, 218-219.

504. Manuscript copy, Kandahar.

"Omar had banned all forms of music, but riding in his SUV he liked to pop in a CD of Saraji, a Taliban who has sold millions of recordings of patriotic war chants. Head bowed, Omar would lose himself reciting along:

"This is our home, the house of lions and tigers

This is the land of high mountains and green views and rivers

And best of all, this is the country of mujahedin and holy martyrs

We will beat everyone who attacks us

We are the defenders of our great country.""[505]

A prominent political and military figure in southern Afghanistan recalled the following anecdote about Mullah Mohammad Omar's music preferences:

"As we drove through a pass between the mountains just behind Omar's land, Naquib turned on the CD player, and the Toyota was filled with Afghan music. I asked if the CD was his or had come with the car.

"It was here when I got it," Naquib said, opening the CD storage container on the armrest between the front seats. We looked for secular music among the discs of keening prayers, and fiddled with the sound system for a while.

"Are you telling me," I said, when we had made a selection, "that this stuff belonged to the man who put people in prison for listening to music?" Naquib shrugged. "It seems so." The song that was playing, he said, was a popular Afghan tune that vilified General Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord from Mazar-i Sharif. Its chief refrain was "O murderer of the Afghan people."

"What is life without music?" Mullah Naquib said."[506]

Nevertheless, the tarana replaced other forms of music on Afghanistan's radio stations during the 1996-2001 period. As we have seen, the songs addressed a diverse set of themes, but a core set of values and cultural tropes were frequently repeated.

505. Johnson and Thomas, 2002.

506. Anderson, 2002, 154-155.

(iv) Leisure

Music fell into the loose category dubbed "meaningless things" by some writers. Leisure activities were suspect and seen as theoretically opening a path or opportunity to wrongdoing. A March 2001 op-ed entitled "Music from the Islamic perspective" stated that:

> *"Singing provides the strongest temptation towards sin. In fact singing is the Satan's voice. […] This is a sin which equal to the sin of polytheism. Singing and dancing the habits which exclusively belong to the Satan."*[507]

(v) Other changes

Some changes were made for purely ideological reasons, such as the shift from using a solar calendar to a lunar calendar. This brought Afghanistan onto the Islamic calendar system, but it appears to have failed as a policy purely for practical reasons. The listing of dates on decrees and newspapers, for example, suffered throughout the period of their government from the inconsistent conversion between the two systems, despite the adoption and change being formally issued in March 1998.[508]

The attempt to outlaw the celebration of *nawruz* or the Persian New Year seems to have failed on more pragmatic grounds: provincial authorities in certain parts of the country allowed celebrations to take place on account of fears that enforcing a ban would lead to riots and civil disturbances.[509] The fact that the horseback sport of Buzkashi, popular in northern Afghanistan, wasn't banned under the Taliban seems inconsistent, except for the fact that leaders operating in the northern provinces must have realised that they ran similar risks to trying to outlaw *nawruz*. Accordingly, despite the fact that gambling was as much a 'risk' for Buzkashi as other sports, senior officials were reported attending contests in early 2001 and independence celebrations

507. Himat, 2001.

508. Editorial team, 1998j; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 1998.

509. United Nations, 2001b.

that year (in August) also saw the government organise a match with riders from Paktika and Ghazni.[510]

As in other parts of the way the Taliban governed, the element of chance featured prominently in how policies were implemented and/or drafted. Herat in 2000 saw the appointment of a new head of the *Amr bil Marouf* department, and this reportedly resulted in a sharp increase of actions "such as kite burning, killing of pet pigeons and regular punishments for trimmed beards or missed prayers."[511] Moreover, the law was usually written in a way that gave license for a broad interpretation.

(vi) A Taliban culture

Regarding an actively-oriented programme to support culture around the country, policies tended to elevate and promote 'Islamic culture', though the precise definition of that was something unique to the Taliban and not, as an examination of Islamicate cultural practices around the world testifies, universal. The clearest expressions of this intent are to be found in the last two years of the Taliban government, such as the injunctions to promote 'Islamic' styles of clothing or, in an example from April 2000, "the value and the status of the turban from a *shari'a* perspective."[512]

Poets were encouraged to promote this 'Islamic culture' as well, in part as a "defence against the enemies of Islam."[513] Indeed, writers were seen as being on the ideological front lines, parallel to the fighters active in the extension of the movement's writ around the country. An op-ed entitled "The duty of writers in today's Afghanistan" published in August 1995 notes that:

> *"It is the duty of the young writes of our time to expose the evil and help differentiate between the good and the bad. It is hence a very important responsibility and our young writers should*

510. Editorial team, 2001a; Editorial team, 2001i.

511. United Nations, 2000.

512. Hakeemzada, 2000.

513. Editorial team, 2000m.

now come forward and help their countrymen chose the right path. A writer must be firm in his belief and should be committed to his identity and his Islamic ideology."[514]

Writers were also, he continues, entrusted with the important duty of keeping the memory of the *jihad* alive. This was an important part of their cultural and ethical identity and poetry was the way to connect the abstract with the emotional.

Poetry was, as we have already seen, one of the most prominent parts of the Taliban's cultural output. The Ministry of Information and Culture funded the publication of collections of poems by certain preferred authors.[515] Officials and senior leaders were not shy to offer their opinions about this poetic output associated with the movement. In March 1997, *Shariat* newspaper organised a poetry recital and contest in Kabul, held at the Intercontinental Hotel with much fanfare. Many senior figures attended its sessions and it was extensively covered by national media outlets. The Deputy Minister of Culture and Information, Mawlawi Abdur Rahman Hotaki, stated that the Taliban's contribution to society was not only to "ensure an Islamic system, territorial integrity, and the political and national sovereignty of their homeland", but also to engage in the "cultural construction of the country."[516] Indeed, many articles noted that the event was a strong statement in opposition to those who claimed that the Taliban had no culture or were inimical to its expression.[517]

Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, the head of the Council of Ministers, stated that "on the one hand, it reinforces our dying culture and literature; on the other hand, it is increases commitment of our nation." He added that the event also made him proud of the Islamic culture expressed and that writing poems were clearly part of the effort to rebuild the nation:

"You know that literature is a big portion of intellectual culture; nations and people are known by their literature and culture, but the beauty is added to it with art and beautiful culture. Islamic culture is wealthier and more beautiful than the rest of the cultures in the world and it

514. Saeed, 1995.

515. Bismillah Sahar's anthology was published in this way in April 2000 (Editorial team, 2000c).

516. Editorial team, 1997b.

517. See, for example: Editorial team, 1997k.

has passed several centuries. […] "Our enemies who wanted to ruin everything we had, were intended to destroy our culture and literature as well, but great God had not intended so and paved the ground for the language of your pen once again so that you would not just rebuilt and shine it, but completely turn it to the beautiful path of Islam and Islamic Sharia. With the beginning of the Islamic Jihad in Afghanistan, poem, writing, connection, separation, competitor and strangers have changed forms and Mujahid poets are separate from that process now. They are going in the same way with Islam and Jihad, martyrdom and sacrifice, heroism and bravery."[518]

Events promoting female poets from Afghanistan's history as well as the publication of poems written by women were similar seen as offering proof of the Taliban's promotion of a rich culture.[519]

The Taliban's approach to culture was idiosyncratic but falls into certain patterns about how policy was implemented and designed within the senior leadership circles. Ideological elements certainly were part of their approach — particularly for the emotionally-charged matter of culture — but pragmatism and chance also played their roles. It is through poetry, though, that the primary cultural expression of the movement took place, and a more systematic evaluation by scholars of South Asian literatures of how poets worked within the strictures encouraged by the government will be very useful going forward.

(c) Education policy

In September 1995, the Taliban took control of Herat, the first urban centre and major city outside southern Afghanistan. Within days, all girls schools and much of the secular educational system in the city were closed. A similar pattern followed in Kabul a year later.[520]

518. Rabbani, 1997a.

519. Editorial team, 1998b; Zahed, 1997.

520. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 15. The argument that because there were battles in the north of the country that schools could not have been opened in Kabul is disingenuous. From September 1996, Kabul City was more or less calm in terms of security, and to say that the country was at war so everything was temporary is an insufficient explanation for why things happened the way they did.

The Taliban's standard position on their education policies of the 1990s has been consistent in the post-2001 period. From official spokesmen to former and current members of the old generation, all point out almost without exception that in 1996 when the Taliban took Kabul, the movement closed down girls schools because the leadership weren't able to guarantee the safety of the girls. A UN report summarised their reasoning as follows:

> *"The rigidity in the application of the Islamic law was justified, in the Taliban's perspective by the debauchery that permeated the Kandahar society in the last days of the Mujahadin commanders, including open conduct of homosexuality and the sexual harassment of girls, particularly on their way to schools. The Taliban reacted strongly against these conducts. In the absence of sound and practical alternatives they decided to close the schools for girls until a proper civil order had been established. The Taliban admitted […] that this particular decree was extra-Islamic but considered it justifiable under the circumstances."*[521]

They were planning to reopen these schools, they held, but they did not have the resources to do so in an appropriate manner.[522]

If the Taliban would have had access to resources (from the international community), they argue, they could have addressed the issue of education and found a solution that would have satisfied all parties. Much of this is revisionism of one sort or another. A closer look into the issues surrounding education and the exclusion of girls and women shows that the lack of resources (or the 'war situation' that is often cited) only played a small role.

Internal consideration—in particular, the avoidance of conflicts among the group themselves as well as with their rural supporters—seems to offer an explanation of why those who appear to have genuinely held different beliefs chose to fall into line.[523] The

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521. Vaux, 2003, 132.

522. This extended from logistical issues of transporting girls to and from the schools, having separate school buildings, and the lack of separate female schoolteachers.

523. The process to change edicts once applied, was further complicated by having religious ideology as the basis of discussions. Concepts like *fitna*, causing division amongst the umma, played a role in individuals' considerations. The oath that people swore toward Mullah Mohammad Omar, the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*, turned contradicting his orders and views into a de facto religious argument and questioning personal loyalties. An example for this increasingly fragile support is the failed first opium ban, which the leadership recalled when they faced a popular backlash. The Taliban, when entering Helmand for the first time following their success in Kandahar, sought to prohibit poppy cultivation.

Taliban only gradually challenged what they perceived as their core supporters and members. Their need to display a coherent and unified line, as outlined above, seems to been largely motivated by public opinion, rather than a concern with rigid enforcement across all territory under their control.

One interviewee recalled a meeting between doctors from Médecins Sans Frontières and Mullah Ghaus, the then foreign minister. The doctors questioned Mullah Ghaus about why he did not allow girls to attend school. "I want," Ghaus replied, "my own wife to become a doctor. It is unacceptable that someone tells me that women should not be allowed to go to school. It is completely wrong." But, he said, "we promised the fighters that we would first finish the war, since they would never accept this, and only then can we open the schools."[524]

The few efforts that were being made saw little publicity, such as the program run by Dr. Sohaila Siddique, a prominent physician and senior official in various governments, to train hundreds of female doctors and nurses in Kabul which was not publicly acknowledged or publicised to the Taliban rank-and-file fighters.[525] The program was sanctioned by Mullah Mohammad Omar, who had secretly ordered it from Kandahar.[526]

Mullah Mohammad Omar engaged on the issue of education beyond just the issuing of edicts. In a discussion about women's education with an 'Alim who occupied a senior judicial post in Kabul and later Kandahar, he stated in early 1999 that "it is far better that qualified women health personnel be available to treat women, for which we need education."[527] He went on to agree with his interlocutor that both women and men have rights to education.[528]

Both the cultivation and consumption of opium and marijuana were banned. This eventually became untenable, however, and they faced a strong backlash from farmers. By 1996, this first ban on poppy was lifted. A later countrywide ban was completed by 2000, but again this was highly unpopular and the Taliban were not able to substitute or replace the lost livelihoods in rural areas as a consequence of their ban. See Felbab-Brown, 2010, Kindle Electronic Location: 1576 and 1590-1.

524. Interview, Kabul, July 2012.

525. Interview, Kabul, July 2012.

526. Interviews, Kabul, July and August 2012.

527. This discussion was held in early 1999, and was reported to the authors by an interviewee in May 2012.

528. This view echoes programs that were developed during the 1990s as outlined in earlier sections.

At the core, the leaders of the movement, particularly Mullah Mohammad Omar, regarded education as *farz,* a religious obligation.[529] This is a belief that was reflected in documents from the time and as well as today.[530] Mullah Mohammad Omar issued an op-ed in *Shariat* newspaper in April 1997, for example, in which he prominently declared that the "university is our intellectual wealth and [the] country's main source of development".[531]

Islamic education, the Taliban leadership believed, was central to avoid what had led to the destruction of Afghanistan, namely the communism and atheism taught in secular state schools and universities. The state schools, with their emphasis of secular subjects, needed to be reformed.[532] The solution seemed clear—increase religious subjects and minimise or even eliminate the others.[533]

The importance of education and the need for central control seems to have been an idea that took as much inspiration from Soviet policy as specific Islamic beliefs. Much like the Soviet Union tried to ideologise the youth in the 1980s, the Taliban's 'educational policy' was an attempt to correct, and in part educate, a new generation that would follow in their footsteps:

> *"The communist parties all grew up from schools. And whenever they opened a new school, then they opened a new party (or had new communist support). So that's why the Taliban thought this would be a way to spread Islam — they took this example and they changed the books for that reason. They wanted it to be according to the rule of Islam (and they wanted to spread Islam), so that's why they changed the books. Their whole plan was to do it (i.e. spread Islam) through madrassas — to close schools, and to bring Islamic books through schools and so on."*[534]

The discussion took place immediately prior to his issuing the secret permission for girls to receive a nursing/medical education.

529. In this, the Taliban relied on their own understanding of what constituted an Islamic education.

530. See, for example, the Taliban's education constitution from the 1990s (authors' copy).

531. Omar, 1997a.

532. Some state schools were closed, others were left open and subjected to curriculum changes.

533. Interviews, Kabul, July and August 2012. Also see Giustozzi, 2010, 26.

534. Interview, Kabul, August 2012.

Chapter five of the Taliban's educational constitution (issued during the 1990s) states that one of the objectives of secondary education is "loyalty to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."[535]

The Taliban government's shifting internal structure, with ministries located in Kabul while its leadership was based in Kandahar, meant that what policy was agreed upon was unevenly implemented around the country. Agreements made with international partners to support schools and other initiatives were frequently vetoed from Kandahar without explanation. International NGOs would travel to Kandahar to seek a direct agreement with the leadership in order to avoid what appeared to be a common problem of bureaucracy between Kandahar and Kabul.

The improvised organisational setup of the Taliban's government—where responsibilities and mandates were not clearly defined, or followed—meant that the mechanisms of command, control and debate among the Taliban were ineffective and followed an idiosyncratic logic. One interviewee explained a new teaching method that one senior leader considered:

> *"Yes, Mutawakil was very interested in new technologies. He was always thinking about [the possibility of] teaching by television. A CCTV method. One teacher in one room could teach several classes. For example, for girls. It would have been a better way for the Taliban to accept these things. But this kind of technology was banned by Mawlawi Qalamuddin."*[536]

A decision-making apparatus nominally independent with discretion to handle the business of government ministries in Kabul was, in reality, subordinate to the office and institution of the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen*, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, who could veto or change (or propose his own) decisions. The leadership as a result continued to build on informal institutions, personal relationships and contacts while in effect creating an empty shell of formal ministries and government bodies.[537] As a

535. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2001, 4.

536. Interview, Kabul, July 2012.

537. This is, of course, a simplification. The power and functionality of an institution rested with the standing of the individuals involved in leading it, and their personal relationship to Mullah Mohammad Omar and so on.

UN report stated, the Taliban "prefer ignoring, or pretending to ignore, necessary arrangements that deviate from their policies, such as community-based schools for girls, rather than engaging in a process that will force the movement to engage in a policy-making process."[538]

At times, these differences would translate into contradicting actions, with the senior leadership vetoing programs or initiatives supported by other parts of the movement. Interviewees recalled separate instances where international NGOs or governments offered funding to support education along the lines that the Taliban had publicly proposed, only to find their offers summarily rejected by the office of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. For example:

> *"One time, a Norwegian delegation came to Kabul. The deputy foreign minister of Norway was at the head of this delegation. He asked Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai [the deputy minister] "why have you closed the door of girls schools?"*
>
> *Stanikzai said, "Security is bad. We need vehicles to take these girls to and from the schools."*
>
> *The Norwegian Deputy Minister said, "If we provide these vehicles, will you reopen them?"*
>
> *Stanikzai said, "Yes yes. We are ready to do so."*
>
> *The Norwegian said, "We want to rebuild two girls schools, and we will provide vehicles for this. Then they can travel very safely to and from the schools. You are ready to accept this?"*
>
> *Stanikzai said, "I'll have to check with Mullah Mohammad Omar in Kandahar."*
>
> *After that, nothing happened. I think it was blocked in Kandahar."*[539]

This translated into vastly different application of policy, with an implicit 'don't ask don't tell' policy, that would even be applied by the central leadership itself at times. Intervention in the decisions of provincial governors—important in the case of education—only took place when the issue would become prominent and could be perceived as a challenge to the leadership. Outside a public debate, provincial governors and local leadership officials could offer lasting agreements that did flourish into functioning programs, including in the area of education.[540]

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538. Vaux, 2003, 132.

539. Interview, former Taliban government employee, July 2012.

540. Many of the Taliban's policies were implemented unevenly across the country. While the banning of girls education in Kabul, for example, was strictly enforced, the situation outside the capital was

(i) Local experiences under the Islamic Emirate

What is often described as the Taliban's rigid stance on education is complicated by a more detailed look at the educational programs that were implemented during their rule. Individual NGOs that continued to work in Afghanistan during the late 1990s took fundamentally different approaches in dealing with the Taliban. In the case of education, some had significant success. As in other sectors, constructive external engagement with the Taliban had significant implications for the movement's policy and its implementation.

CARE International and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) ran programs outside the cities in the provinces. Both NGOs took (and continue to take) a similar approach when it came to running schools and educational programs. They started small, focusing on a limited number of communities to provide access to basic education.[541] Through local ownership, with the support of local councils that would negotiate with Taliban officials if needed, they managed to create lasting programs that gradually expanded into other communities and provinces.

CARE ran schools in Khost, Gardez, Ghazni, Lowgar, Wardak, Shomali Valley and Kabul. Girls comprised approximately 60% of the total student population. They were educating around 40,000 students at the height of their activities during the Taliban government years. This seemingly counterintuitive number was in part because boys (particularly in the provinces and districts) had more educational opportunities, while girls could not travel very far from their homes so often these schools were the only choice they had.[542] As of December 2000, there were just under 17,700 students being educated in 257 schools, with a 44% female enrolment rate, in CARE schools.[543]

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considerably different, and in the districts there appears to have been far greater leeway afforded (even to foreign NGOs), where tens of thousands of girls continued to receive an education, albeit outside the public eye.

541. This often happened in the years prior to the Taliban's expansion into these particular areas.

542. Interviews with CARE staff members, Kabul, July 2012.

543. Email correspondence with CARE staff, July 2012.

A study by international NGO Mercy Corps International conducted among women in southern Afghanistan from 1998-99 (and some refugees living in camps across the border in Baluchistan, Pakistan) showed that education had been curtailed in a number of areas of Helmand province.[544] Dozens of women were interviewed over a period of several months, and their opinions on education were sought (amongst other things). Women seemed to be increasingly aware of education and of the benefits that it brought but said that they were either unable to access this education on account of the Taliban or on account of their family and the local community around them.

The picture that emerges shows the beginnings of change within a deeply conservative society. The war — that had seen six million refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries where culture and education were different — had brought back a new appreciation, albeit not one that extended to all the respondents interviewed.

While close to all respondents stated that they had developed an understanding of the benefits of education, others represented what appears to be a very conservative outlook as to the benefits that appear to be fuelled by a fear of change. Some responses appear to mirror the overall experience of many regarding the Taliban. While they welcomed the end the chaos and anarchy, many of their rules and edicts, as well as methods, were not. Overall, however, it appears, based on this study and several interviews conducted in southern Afghanistan, that the interference of the Taliban was much reduced in the rural context. Much of the subjugation that the Taliban enforced throughout the country was already a reality among rural communities. Of course, this a rather broad statement, and as usual regional differences from one valley to the next could be significantly different in social organisation, rules and customs.

> *"In Surkhab refugee village, the Taliban threatened to cut the hands off of any parents who send daughters over 10 years old to school. This caused outrage particularly among women. The issue was resolved within the community. Salma Bibi (58, SUR 3), a community health committee member, feels that it is not only the Taliban that are to blame:*
>
> *"Of course, girls and women are not allowed to get education, but we can't blame only the Taliban. Before the people in villages did not want to get education because of culture or*

544. Pont, 2001.

tradition. I don't know. But now we know that everyone has to get education. Education is necessary for survival."[545]

Another interviewee expressed her frustration with the local community:

"The restrictions are not only the Taliban. Who makes the government? Of course society. Who is society? Of course community. So our society does not prefer education for women, only in cities people want female education. Even if we shout that we want to get education, we can't get it. We should realise we are living in a male-dominated society."[546]

The respondents echo the findings of Karlsson and Mansory, "Afghanistan is characterised by strict gender segregation and the girl is taught to prepare herself for marriage and learn useful domestic skills and the boy to be a protector of his family and family honour."[547]

Soon after the Taliban took Kabul, girls schools were closed and women were banned from working.[548] Women were required to be accompanied by a male relative or *mahram* when outside the home. As Oxfam noted at the time, the Taliban had brought a custom that had long been present among rural Pashtun communities into the cities. Based on its gender policy, Oxfam saw the Taliban edicts as grounds to suspend its programs. The objective was "to force the Taliban to change its position on women."[549] Oxfam actively lobbied other NGOs and international organisations to follow its example and to exert pressure on the Afghan Taliban by withholding services.

While Oxfam maintained its principled stance, other NGOs worked around or within the Taliban's edicts. A senior manager stated the results of the campaign: "the Taliban took no notice—they had a war to fight, and the solidarity collapsed."[550] By focusing on

545. Pont, 2001, 77.

546. Pont, 2001, 78.

547. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 7.

548. There were some notable exceptions. Qari Barakatullah Salim is reported to have run a large girls-only school in Kabul throughout the period of Taliban rule. See Fergusson, 2011, 69.

549. Vaux, 2003, 125.

550. Vaux, 2003, 126.

the Taliban edicts, Oxfam missed the ground realities. While issuing edicts on principles, the senior leadership left implementation up to local representatives.[551] This system "produced an unpredictable climate, but one in which it was possible for everyone, including women, to work, although with many limitations and risks."[552]

Because authority within the movement was scattered, conventional approaches to engage with the Taliban often failed. An assessment from the time states:

> *"The system was impenetrable to Western processes of lobbying. The importance of the Mullah was to provide religious certainty as a unifying force. The edicts themselves could be quietly ignored, but the authority could not."*[553]

Interlocutors, politicians and non-governmental organisations that took adversarial approaches mostly walked away with few results. Organisations such as CARE and the Swedish Committee, however, managed to work within the chaotic system, often reaching compromises with the Taliban on a local level as well as with the central leadership in Kandahar.

Education, while central to the group's self-image, only appears to have played a secondary role in practice. Provision of schooling in the rural homelands of southern Afghanistan seems to have been characterised by attitudes that stemmed from the 1980s and prior: secular education was corrupting the youth; Islamic education—in the form of madrassas—were seen as the solution. Without a coherent plan, the Taliban's policies were implemented unevenly, and their enforcement depended heavily on the individuals involved on the local level. While the first step—the closure of the secular education system—was implemented swiftly, the follow-up to establish an alternative, Islamic school system that could service the population was slow. In the case of education for girls, no national alternative was offered at all.

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551. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 15.

552. Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, 130. "My philosophy was: to the extent to which they act as a responsible authority, we will treat them as a responsible authority," was how one former senior CARE employee described their approach (Interview, Kabul, June 2012).

553. Vaux, 2003, 130.

(d) "Protecting the Islamic Movement from veering off the course"

An oped published in *Shariat* newspaper in November 1999 entitled "Ways of protecting the Islamic Movement from veering off the course" lists ten "ways the movement can remain pure".[554] It can serve as a way of highlighting some of the ways that the Taliban sought to remain balanced as the composition of the state and the citizens under their rule changed, and as more responsibilities fell on their shoulders. The main points are as follows:

1) "everything should be done to please Allah Almighty"

2) "The disease of flattery to and comprise with untrue ideologies and thoughts should not arise among the workers of the movement"

3) "Attention should be paid to seekers of wisdom and understanding"

4) "Religion should be protected from unbalanced ideas"

5) "Workers should be protected from frigidity of thoughts"

6) "Freedom of thought and opinion should be used properly" ("But if a decision is made in the end, one should stop insisting on one's opinion. 'Everyone for oneself' is a course fatal to harmony in a movement.")

7) "develop passion for [Arabic] "preventing the evil and enjoining the good""

8) "The correct concept of following the Emir should be kept in mind"

9) "Frustration and pessimism should be stopped"

10) "Every task should not be linked to tangible results as success"

We can note some of the fears that afflicted the senior leadership: the need to protect the purity of the movement; the results of fragmentation and disunity; the need for good advice and the sense that the long-term work of governing and developing a

554. Editorial team, 1999c.

country was different from the things they had previously been involved in. This article is notable in how open the criticisms are stated, though it makes the case that debate and freedom of thought should and can benefit the movement and not cause disunity and disintegration.

The senior leadership sought to balance the demands of loyalty to God and their beliefs with the challenges of ruling over a country. In retrospect, it makes sense that they chose to take the path of least resistance, keeping as much as possible the same, and changing structures slowly, feeling their way as they went.

7. Mechanisms II — External

Taliban identity and its manifestations were highly influenced by external factors. Policies issued and actions taken were not simply the product of methodical consideration and debate within the movement, though that did happen on occasion. Rather, the movement found themselves in the centre of several international and ideological disputes. Some of these were problems of the Taliban's own making; others were unanticipated and unprovoked. It is for this reason that we must examine the role that external interactions played in the formation of Taliban policy.

For a government so widely known for its 'isolation' from the world, the Taliban had a relatively large number of points of interaction with external actors.[555] Their government had only been given official recognition by three countries but maintained unofficial diplomatic relations either in person or via other conduits. These country-to-country relations ranged over the full spectrum of levels of friendship, from friend to foe to complete stranger. The Taliban were never in a position of international alignment and acceptance so they found allies where they could.

On the individual level, the Taliban government and its leadership interacted with a large number of interlocutors, some affiliated with governments but most not. These also ranged in their palatability from the Taliban's perspective. Sensitive conversations and interactions were sometimes only possible via these actors, and it is notable that the Taliban were often as much influenced by individuals as they were by the official machinery of states. Meetings with either state representatives or unaffiliated individuals sometimes took place directly with Mullah Mohammad Omar himself but more often were indirect and via a delegate. This could dramatically affect the outcome of any particular interaction and the extent to which any suggestions ultimately received attention and action was taken.

International relations sometimes happened through the mediations of lawyers. This applied to acute manifestations like the international sanctions administered by the

555. Rashid, 1996a.

United Nations in 1999 as well as more mundane manifestations of NGOs and the other parts of the United Nations apparatus focused on development and emergency relief, for example.

Interactions were not limited to meetings between individuals. Media outlets frequently were used as the go-between for messages between the Taliban government and external actors, with all the predictable consequences: dramatic (and needless) escalations provoked by misunderstandings derived from a Chinese-whispers-inspired diplomacy. The limited availability of Taliban actors on international platforms meant that the realm of ideas was one that they felt like they could and should act.

The fact of the senior leadership's isolation from the world did provoke, at times, a certain amount of 'groupthink', but they were not totally disconnected. Many problems came more from miscommunications and unique interpretations of what messages said rather than a complete lack of messages.

This chapter will explore the external interactions that the Taliban's senior leadership experienced on a thematic basis. The following chapter will examine three case studies that exemplify some of the key themes explored here.

(a) Negative interactions

Negative responses made up the bulk of the Taliban's interactions with the world outside Afghanistan. It coloured their foreign policy, was a dominant theme of any meeting with big international aid agencies like the United Nations and their affiliates, and it was the main flavour of how they were covered in foreign media outlets.

Negative is used here in the sense that the external party is either offering criticism or a negative response to something they see in the Taliban movement. It is not used by me in the sense of a value judgement, though that was in part what many external parties sought to impart through their words or actions. The sections that follow offer an analysis of the three escalations of negative interaction — persuasion, threats and physical force — as well as a discussion of the way that criticism and ideas worked to influence the Taliban.

(i) Persuasion

Persuasion was the first level at which many external interlocutors interacted with the Taliban's senior leadership. Those working as part of the foreign policy apparatus quickly became inured to the laundry list of international complaints that diplomats brung to meetings. Often it seemed to those involved that persuasion was not the point of diplomatic interactions, but rather that foreigners came to offer lectures.

There are, however, several examples where international partners did believe they could persuade their Taliban partners of the virtues of one or another policy. The United Nations sought changes and policy adoption among the Taliban in a variety of ways: internal governmental reforms of structures and considering the possibility of power-sharing with other political/armed groups, as well as other measures relating to school attendance or the issue of bin Laden. Representatives of the United States seemed primarily busy with bin Laden, albeit with more overt demands that he be handed over to their authorities. Pakistani third-parties (some governmental, but others from the religious elites, for example) were perhaps most active and had the most access to the senior leadership, though this did not always translate to direct policy influence. Indeed, Pakistani diplomats recall the difficulties in getting the Afghan Taliban to do anything during this period. Saudi Arabia's representatives also sought to convince Mullah Mohammad Omar and the senior leadership as to the benefits of handing over bin Laden.

Taliban diplomats and leaders experienced varying approaches on the same issue. The Chinese approach to managing their worries about internationally-focused militancy based out of Afghanistan was markedly different from that employed by the United States, for example. The Chinese sought first to create a working relationship with the Taliban — through trade and other non-sensitive support — and only then were certain requests made, albeit without being phrased as demands or as something that could not be negotiated or discussed further.[556] They were arguably more successful in

556. Above all, it was the sense that the Chinese were "fair" and "neutral" interlocutors that the Taliban appreciated (and compared/contrasted with their experiences with the Americans at the time).

this policy than the United States, who often lectured Taliban diplomats and presented lists of demands.

The key point to note about persuasion with regards to the Taliban's senior leadership is that they seemed to have been instinctually resistant to the idea, especially when it was carried out overtly. This was the result of their general experience of interaction with foreign diplomats — most of which was some criticism or demand — as well as their understanding of the proprieties surrounding advice or *shura*. Recall from above how Mawlawi Ludhianvi explained how advice should be offered without expectation of change, and from a position where the authority and final decision-making power rested with the *amir*. As part of this initial alignment, the authority of the *amir* and his government would be seen as legitimate. Needless to say, it would be hard to imagine that many external interactions began from this starting-point.

Another important factor was the preference not to have demands forced upon them. Some have explained this as a characteristic derived from their Pashtun heritage, but arguably this is something more universal: the need to save face and preserve their autonomy in dealings with others.

The Taliban did not respond well to threats and lists of demands. By early 2000, there was a sense that this was the preferred US negotiating tactic and that an accession to the core list of demands would only lead to more and more being imposed.

> *"The Taliban realised that the US had a huge list of demands. For some things — even things where Islam came into question — we were willing to change, or slowly shift how we did things, but the list was so long and there were so many requests so quickly. [...] At first they were telling us that we should try to model ourselves on Turkey and have a government like that. But then they started to tell us not to cut off the hands of thieves, or to change the killing of this woman or that man. They then told the Taliban that, "you should remove the Islamic rules from your government." When the Taliban leaders saw these ever- increasing lists, they started to think that it was a trick and that agreeing to one set of demands would only bring another set. Eventually we told them straight-out that they were just giving us lists of demands and that we wouldn't concede anything without getting something ourselves first."*[557]

557. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

The worry was both that too many changes would be imposed from outside, but also that this was becoming the outside perception.

> *"If we conceded to everything then we would be no better that just American puppets. We would be the slaves of America."*[558]

This slippery slope was one the Taliban sought to avoid, but it was difficult in an environment characterised by what they saw as zero-sum negotiation tactics from the Americans. With regards to bin Laden, for example, there was a strong feeling on the part of the Taliban that they were making efforts to resolve the issue — it was something that they wanted to deal with in any case — but that the US and the international community would not meet them halfway. This was echoed in discussions over counter-narcotics, crime reduction and in several other domains.

Differences of approach concerning logic and what constituted 'proof' or facts would also be important in how the Taliban responded to persuasion.[559] Many of the Taliban's arguments rested on the application of principles. Many of the demands put forward by foreigners — while easily explainable in the context of international relations, nation states, and self-interest, as well as nations' idiosyncratic understandings of their place in the world — were lost on the Taliban. They were able to understand the demands, but could not accept what they believed to be inherently flawed logic.

Persuasion was more or less successful at multiple levels of interaction with the Taliban's government apparatus. Meetings between a senior diplomat and Mullah Mohammad Omar in Kandahar, for example, was qualitatively different from a meeting held between a United Nations delegate and his counterpart in a ministry in Kabul.

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558. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

559. Taliban delegates grew frustrated at the provisioning of articles in the New York Times, for example, as constituting 'proof' or evidence in the matter of bin Laden (Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011, 135).

(ii) Threats

Threats are the next step up in the escalation of negative external interaction, and they were frequently employed during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This tactic was often a toothless gesture because external actors had few points of leverage with the Taliban. Their government was already exiled outside the international political system; they had an economy that was incapable of supporting the needs of its people; and they had no political pressures of election cycles or any such short-term internal challenges to their rule.

A sense of frustration with the international community was evident early on, as expressed in this *Tolo-ye Afghan* editorial in May 1995:

> *"Leave us alone and mind your own business. If you really are so concerned about human rights then you should destroy all your atomic weapons. Stop bothering us."*[560]

The argument made in the article questioned the fairness of international policy towards the Taliban, calling for an end to perceived double-standards.

Threats were frequently levelled by the United Nations and American delegates, increasingly so towards the end of the Taliban's rule. International frustration over bin Laden, women's rights and the ongoing matter of the role of other political actors in the national political system meant meetings often devolved into the deployment of zero-sum argumentation.

Taliban officials and the government as a whole responded badly to the use of this kind of tactic. Indeed, the more international actors threatened the movement, the more they seemed to dig in on certain issues. As we saw above in the case of education, Mullah Mohammad Omar was often willing to take action on certain policies, but only if they were not seen as caving into external demands. Thus, some health and

560. Editorial team, 1995a.

education programmes for women were launched in secret for this reason, with instructions to local media outlets not to cover them.

In many cases, particularly with regards to the United Nations, the Taliban simply were willing to call their bluff. The sanctions regime imposed on the Taliban in 1999, and reaffirmed or strengthened in the years that followed, was ultimately ineffective: bin Laden was not handed over and the Taliban did not make concessions on any of the other key UN demands. The United Nations ultimately were responsible for the basic food security affecting the wider Afghan population, particularly in severe drought conditions, and the Taliban correctly calculated that they would not let people starve.

The isolation of the movement from the international sphere made them highly resistant to threats of the kind employed during the 1990s. Not only was there little leverage, but the Taliban had no comparable political calendar or sense of urgency to take action. The use of media outlets to transmit threats led to the escalation of an atmosphere of hostility between external actors in many cases, and ultimately made deal-making and cooperation hard to achieve, especially at the national level.

(iii) Physical force

Physical force was usually not included as part of the threats issued by international actors because there was little chance it would ever happen. Afghanistan was not important enough as an issue for the United Nations or the United States; it took bin Laden's 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania to provoke cruise missile attacks but even that was more symbolic an action than anything linked to negotiations or a long-term political plan. These were minimal measures and the Taliban knew that international action of any long-lasting kind was unlikely to take place.

Indirect action (read: arming local military groups) was the default policy for many international actors, but even that was difficult to coordinate with a broader

programme because — prior to September 2001 — there was very little incentive to exert efforts to create a durable political settlement.

As with the lesser incarnations of this negative interaction, the Taliban responded poorly to its use. Much was made of the cruise missile attacks in 1998, within the government and on the pages of its flagship publications. The missiles were dubbed "Monica rockets" and several op-ed articles were written on the moral inconsistency of President Clinton.[561]

> *"One of the most asked questions during my February 2000, trip to Afghanistan was, "How could President Clinton remain in power after confessing to adultery?" The mullahs in power were shocked that he still held office. I told them that the President of the United States never really admitted to adultery, but they insisted that they heard he had on the radio. They also read in newspapers that he had confessed. I wondered how they had heard of this so quickly but had never heard anything about some of the terrible things that bin Laden was accused of initiating. "According to Clinton, he did not commit adultery. He committed a sin," I explained. "A woman had oral sex with him." They had no idea what that meant. I explained how oral sex is performed to the group of Afghan holy men. After my explanation, half of them said they wanted to puke, the other half laughed. It was a shocking practice for this group of religious war veterans who felt that only animals licked each other. I said that it was pretty common in Western society. Their next question, "How come it isn't a sin?" "It probably is a sin, but Clinton didn't think it was adultery," I said. "Then what is it?" "In a way he was right. In no holy books - Old Testament, New Testament, Quran — is there any punishment for that kind of sex." This made the mullahs laugh. They wanted to know how Clinton came up with the distinction. I asked them how they would convict a person who had committed that type of sin. They had no answer and admitted that Clinton was clever and unique."*[562]

Public posturing aside, the rockets may have been inconsequential to the stability of the Taliban government, but it reinforced their sense that the international political circuit was not treating them fairly. Indeed, the word "fair" is frequently to be found in statements and articles published during the period of their rule.[563] Strictly speaking, the concept of 'fair' is not one with a direct Islamic precedent but it does tie into the premium placed on "justice" and the need to conform to universal standards. Foreign policy was a domain where the Taliban were not on the same level as other players, either from the perspective of the United Nations or individual countries.

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561. Saqib, 2000; Editorial team, 1998e; Editorial team, 1998a.

562. Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011, 80.

563. Editorial team, 1996d; Unknown, 1995a.

(iv) Criticism

Not all interactions with the world outside the Taliban's leadership circles took place face-to-face or mediated through direct contact between individuals. Some negative interactions with the Taliban took place in the realm of ideas, passed through longer texts with a slower gestation. This was the case for several pieces of criticism by Islamic scholars and clerics of the Taliban movement in their later years, for example.

Some of this criticism and advice was passed to the Taliban internally, thus allowing the leadership and Mullah Mohammad Omar to save face. Some of the basic principles of giving advice (like those outlined and summarised by Ludhianvi) worked to prevent much direct or outspoken criticism. Likewise, the desire to avoid disunity prevented the voicing of strong criticism in anywhere that could be considered public. The priority given to maintaining a united public face meant that it is difficult to find much internal criticism of this kind when researching years later. What has remained is mostly that attributed to foreign Islamists who were based inside Afghanistan during the late 1990s, and that of more mainstream Islamic scholarship such as clerics reacting to the imminent destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues in 2001.

The Taliban received a number of challenges from Arabs based in Peshawar, for example, largely on ideological grounds rather than anything practical about policy. The basic differences between the Hanbali and Hanafi legal schools were always present, but the Afghans' practice of visiting graveyard shrines, for example, and other local traditions were subject to attack. 'We differ with our people here about the Taliban regime,' one said. 'They see them as God's righteous saints, while we view them as heretics and apostates.'[564]

These were sufficiently common accusations that both Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Sheikh Yusuf al-Uyayri, prominent writers associated with the foreign Islamists, were forced to address them openly in two position papers which they wrote on the Taliban in

564. This is part of a 'condolence letter' mentioned in the appendix of the Harmony Project report entitled "Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qa'ida from 1989-2006" (published September 2007). The summary of the letter is printed in translation on page 63. The full translation is available in my personal collection. https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/cracks-in-the-foundation-leadership-schisms-in-al-qaida-from-1989-2006 (accessed May 3, 2016).

1998 and 2000 respectively.[565] Indeed, the report begins by acknowledging these claims: 'Those who have diseases in their hearts, the *munafiqun* and *ruwaybidhah*, have recently started to call *Amir al-Mu'minin* al-Mulla Muhammad 'Umar and the Taliban with vile names.'[566] The report then mentions five points of dissent—specific matters of doctrine — and examines each one in turn.[567]

Another key focus of criticism was the Taliban's desire to gain a seat at the United Nations. Al-Suri states that he had discussed this with the movement's leadership and that the Taliban would not be pursuing the matter. A letter from al-Suri to one 'Abu Mohammad' also outlined these points of criticism, noting that the Taliban are characterised as 'extremists of the Sufi sect and straying from the right path.'[568]

In a report sent from the Arab circles in late 1998, the claims again revolve around the idea the Taliban's perceived religious illegitimacy disqualified them from taking the key role in Afghanistan. Just as during the 1980s, the Taliban are seen as promoting 'tomb-worship' and even that this warrants *takfir* (a sort of Islamic excommunication) being applied to the Taliban.[569]

The systems in place at the time were good at isolating Mullah Mohammad Omar from much of this criticism, though he was exposed to it through his close advisors. These layers of protection gave him the ability to ignore most of it.

(b) Positive interactions

The number of actors who sought to win the Taliban over through positive interactions was limited, particularly in the final years of their government, yet there

565. Al-Suri and al-Uyayri, Unknown-1.

566. Al-Suri and al-Uyayri, Unknown-1, 2.

567. The points listed in the report were as follows: 'Quburiyyah, Irja' in Takfir, Sufiyyah and Deobandiyyah, Ta'assub and Taqlid, and joining the United Nations' (Al-Suri and al-Uyayri, Unknown-1, 2).

568. Al-Suri, Unknown-2.

569. Unknown, Unknown-5.

were those who believed there was more to be gained through such encounters than through any of the various manifestations of the 'stick'.

(i) Flattery

Flattery was the easiest and most common way in which positive interactions took place. This was either in person or through a statement made to the international media. The senior Taliban leadership were monitoring international media coverage of their government and noted when individuals made positive comments.[570] This usually didn't mean much for those giving compliments or offering their support to the Taliban government because the Taliban had little to no international leverage at the time.

As a starting position for a discussion, however, it seemed to offer a better way forward than to begin with criticism. The senior leadership was, in any case, not often taken in by effuse flattery. If the Taliban had a problem with you or your organisation, flattery would not be your way through the impasse. This happened with bin Laden, who sought in several meetings with Mullah Mohammad Omar — at least, as we have it from the recollections of those present — to win him over with fine words and compliments. This did not have the required effect, and in one case the Taliban leader even left the meeting early without eating from the vast spread of food that had been prepared for the occasion of his visiting.[571]

A natural suspicion of those outside the inner circle of the Taliban's leadership meant that a variety of approaches to win them over needed to be tried. Flattery, however, seems to have been the least successful of these, if frequently employed. The Taliban appreciated action over sweetly-phrased words; they knew how easy it was to deceive and make false promises. Indeed, their powerlessness within the international political system meant that they interacted with a variety of individuals who promised things without, in the end, delivering on those promises. This is perhaps best illustrated by

570. This media monitoring output was collected in large volumes entitled *Bluton* (a version of the English 'bulletin') along with commentary about the pieces published or broadcast.

571. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 247-248.

the failed negotiations over access to the exploitation of natural resources by Bridas and Unocal, or by the absence of an international response to the Taliban's counter-narcotics efforts.

(ii) Friendship

Personality and individual rapport were crucial to the success of the different tracks of negotiations during the Taliban's government. Certain international figures had good working relationships with their Taliban interlocutors, while others found it much harder to connect.

Much seemed to depend on the personal interaction and how negotiators conducted themselves. A previous history or longer relationship played a role. Negotiators like Francesc Vendrell seem to have been well-liked. He is often described in interviews as an honest person or as "a good person". Several respondents would describe his interactions as being more akin to consultation or opportunities for advice for the Taliban. He spent time explaining issues to the Taliban leadership instead of simply enquiring as to their point of view.

As a point of comparison, Karl Inderfurth, who was the Assistant Undersecretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs between 1997-2001, was described as arrogant and dismissive.

Noticeable attention was also paid to how active the engagement was. Individuals who held frequent meetings in Afghanistan were seen more positively by their Taliban negotiating partners. Lakhdar Brahimi, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, for example, is characterised as having spent little time in Afghanistan in comparison to Vendrell. For that reason, even though he was a Muslim and spoke Arabic (details Taliban interviewees mentioned), his efforts are described as having been less effective.

United Nations Special Representative Norbert Holl was described as a polite man. However, as interviewees stated and his own memoir of his time in Afghanistan proves, his views on the Taliban were heavily filtered through a number of events and

policies.[572] A central issue to Holl was the treatment of women and the Taliban's ban on women's education and secular education. The killing of Najibullah seemed to outrage him personally. A Taliban-government official narrated a meeting with Holl in Kabul:

> *"The first question of his mouth was, "Why can't I see the women on the campus?" This was the first question. I explained that we didn't stop women from receiving an education. We had regular classes and female teachers and female students, just not in this location. We had other campuses and places. [...] He didn't seem to accept this."*[573]

The director of Kabul University explained how women's education and education, in general, were *farz* or obligatory, but that the Taliban lacked the resources to provide education for women given that they would need separate places and transportation. In order to expand their provision of education for girls and women, he had some suggestions for Holl:

> *"[I told him] we need some vehicles to bring the women in a proper and respectful manner to Kabul University to take their classes. He smiled as I said this. It seemed that he didn't agree. "Don't just smile," I said. "Tell me if you are able to do this or not. Just say yes or no. I will write an agreement between us and I will prepare good classes in Kabul University and you can help in all of this." He didn't do anything. After he left, he started propaganda against the Taliban government, just propaganda."*[574]

This meeting — the manner in which Holl conducted himself, the apparent intransigence on his part and what was seen as an unwillingness to help the Taliban — meant that all future meetings were challenging and began with the expectation that nothing useful would come from them. Negotiations, like relationships, were conceived as a continuous undertaking by the Taliban, in particular by the senior leadership. The personal relationship mattered, and so did how an agreement would be formulated and negotiated. Agreements, in a way, only had to be honoured if the counterpart respected them.

572. Holl, 2002.

573. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

574. Interview, June 2013, Kabul.

The role that friendship played in the Taliban's interactions with the outside world was a product of how much personal relationships in general played for the senior leadership. In this way, individuals who had a close understanding with certain leaders were able to offer advice of considerably greater weight than others without that direct connection. Senior figures from the Taliban, and Mullah Mohammad Omar, often seemed to behave as if the individual relationship was what counted, and not the relationship between states.

Trust was key in this respect. If leaders considered an individual to be trustworthy, their opinions would be heard and their advice taken into consideration. Trust was often conferred on the basis of Islamic credentials — i.e. if someone came with a certain pedigree or recommendation through religious networks — but it was also present outside those religious circles. The respect that accrued to UN Special Representative Vendrell was an example of that.

Some countries were seen as having too strong an emphasis on protocol, such that personal relationships never developed. The United States appointed a series of women to senior diplomatic positions in Pakistan in the later years of the Taliban's rule, and this was seen as a direct affront to the senior leadership. It was not so much that they could not meet or talk with women, interviewees explained, but there was never an opportunity to interact outside the fixed and critical agenda of this rotating cast of officials. All interactions were subjugated to the narrow requests and concerns of US policy, and as such there was no chance for a relationship to develop alongside.

(iii) Money

Given Afghanistan's perennially poor economy, financial support was an easy way to curry favour with the Taliban's leadership, especially so during a time when international sanctions were being imposed against their government. The war effort received the lion's share of the budget, and the rest was constituted from taxation, industry and the support of foreign aid organisations.

Taliban interviewees today who look back at their government identify financial support (either as cash or in-kind gifts) as being the smartest way to have influence and respect among senior leadership circles. This was particularly true for gifts and donations that happened without conditions attached. Several aid organisations were prepared to support the Taliban with funding and programmes, if only they would change certain parts of their legal structures or rescind certain laws and so on. That was very much a non-starter from the perspective of the Taliban's government in both Kabul and Kandahar.

Chinese interactions with the Taliban government was very much cemented through the provision of support on a non-conditional basis. From late 1998 onwards, diplomatic and trade ties were established. The Chinese reportedly intervened in ongoing attempts by the Taliban government to recover their +93 country code. Chinese workers were also based in Afghanistan in increasing numbers during these latter years of the Taliban's government, working on telecommunications projects and other infrastructure support.[575]

An op-ed was published in the Taliban's main newspaper, *Shariat*, on September 23, 2000. Entitled "Good relations between Afghanistan and China are in the interests of the region," the article noted the benefits that China could bring for Afghanistan in terms of trade agreements and infrastructure investments while noting that the United States were attempting to sabotage the "good relations and friendship" between the two countries.[576]

Countries in the Gulf also seem to have obtained influence through similar means. Regular trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan for the hunting of birds of prey saw the import of large numbers of vehicles and various other equipment.[577] These were usually left behind for the Taliban to use as they wished. These gifts were significant enough that delegates from these Gulf states received preferential treatment and priority in their meetings with Taliban officials, though the breakdown of the

575. Editorial team, 2001j; Editorial team, 2001l.

576. Editorial team, 2000p.

577. Rashid, 2010, 201.

relationship between the Taliban and Saudi Arabia over bin Laden was an indication of the extent to which those relationships were firmly established.

(iv) Fitting into what the Taliban already knew

The examples listed above show how the Taliban were eager to interact with others who tried to understand and appreciate their rule and their government on its own terms, rather than as something compared to external standards or by starting from a position of antagonism. This was sufficiently rare that it is easy to see why the advice and support of individuals like Mawlawi Ludhianvi (and others like him) was so appreciated. They brought the shared experience of a clerical education and offered advice on the Taliban's terms, without the expectation that they would be able to control outcomes or shift approaches taken on any particular issue. The experience of Chinese diplomacy during this period helps show how work to support the Taliban government gradually allowed for more opportunities for interaction. In late November 2000, a delegation from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, a state-affiliated Chinese think-tank, visited Kabul and Kandahar. They were taken on a tour of the Taliban's government. A small Chinese government delegation, led by their ambassador to Pakistan, also visited Afghanistan in on December 12 and they were able to meet with Mullah Mohammad Omar.[578] By beginning from within the confines and constructs defined by the Taliban's leadership, outside actors were able to slowly expand those in certain directions; in the case of the Chinese, certain guarantees were obtained, for example, that safe haven for militants training to fight against the Chinese government would not be provided.[579]

The Taliban response to these external interactions can broadly be characterised into two broad categories. Firstly, negative interactions were most often met with reaction and opposition on the part of the Taliban. This is and was a natural response, though

578. Pomfret, 2001; Editorial team, 2000k; Khan, 2000; Murphy and Lawrence, 2001; Birstow, 2001.
579. Khan, 1998; Sahay, 1999.

the precise contours of the Taliban response could not always be predicted. In the context of the Taliban's cultural heritage, particularly the parts derived from the Pashtun background of many in the senior leadership, direct threats and affronts were either met in kind or rebuffed with stronger vehemence. Occasionally these negative interactions were left without any response, but these were rare occasions; it was more likely that a negative response would be issued.

Positive interactions, on the other hand, often resulted in a kind of mirroring or absorption of ideas and positions. An initial positive interaction made it far more likely that subsequent meetings would be conducted in conditions conducive to finding solutions. This is not to suggest that the Taliban were always seduced by gifts and kind words, but, for those who sought to influence the movement, these starting points coupled with time spent listening to the Taliban on their own terms counted for a lot.

The following chapter explores the way these interactions and responses took place in three specific areas. These are chosen for the availability of sources as much as their ability to shine a light on different parts of Taliban policy decisions.

8. Policy in Practice II — External

(a) Indian Airlines hijacking (1999)

On December 24, 1999, Indian Airlines Flight 814 took off from Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, flying to Indira Gandhi Airport in Delhi. After the plane had entered Indian airspace, five men hijacked the plane and forced the pilot to divert from its planned course.[580] The hijacking lasted for eight days and ended on December 31 with the handover of three prisoners from the custody of the Indian government. 192 people survived, one person was killed and another wounded. The five perpetrators and the three men that were released escaped.

After taking control, the hijackers forced the pilot to change course and landed in Amritsar (India), Lahore (Pakistan) and Dubai (UAE) after which the hijackers directed the aeroplane to Kandahar. The hijackers forced Captain Sharan to take off from Amritsar without refuelling, fearing an Indian commando attempt to retake the plane. Before landing in Amritsar, the hijackers had attempted to land in Lahore but had not received permission to do so and the pilot himself was worried about landing in Pakistan.[581]

On arrival in Lahore, the authorities shut down the air traffic services and all the lights of the airport in an attempt to prevent the plane from landing. A severe shortage of fuel forced the pilot to attempt a landing nonetheless, believing he could make out the airstrip (but which turned out to be a main highway instead), and only at the last minute did Lahore airport switch on their lights, allowing the plane to land.[582] A National Geographic documentary on the hijacking outlined Pakistani hostility to the plane being landed on their soil: the Pakistani government threatened to shoot it down on approach to Lahore, didn't give permission to offload hostages or injured

580. Singh and Joseph, 1999.
581. Diwanji, 1999.
582. Editorial team, 1999f.

passengers, and less than three hours later (after refuelling) Flight 814 was in the air again.[583]

From Lahore, the plane flew to the United Arab Emirates, where twenty-seven passengers were let go.[584] Rupin Katyal, a 25-year old Indian, was the only fatality of the hijacking. He was stabbed multiple times by one of the hijackers and died on the plane.[585] The plane landed in Kandahar on the morning of December 25.[586]

The negotiations in Kandahar lasted for seven days. As a result of the talks, the Indian government released Mawlana Massoud Azhar, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar. India's Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, flew to Kandahar with the prisoners, where the three men were exchanged for the remaining 154 hostages.[587] The hijackers and freed prisoners then left Afghanistan, driving over the border and into Pakistan via the Chaman border crossing.[588] The Pakistani government denied this.[589]

(i) Taliban reaction

The Taliban's stance and involvement in the hijacking changed as events unfolded. Initially, the Taliban refused to grant landing rights. Although they eventually conceded this,[590] they stated that they did not want to be involved in negotiations and tried to force the hijackers to leave Afghan soil.[591] The initial stance of the Taliban was one of non-involvement.[592] The Taliban leadership first denied landing rights to its

583. *Air Hijack*, National Geographic documentary.

584. The National Geographic documentary states that the hijackers originally sought to fly to Kabul, but there was no facility for performing a night-landing so they decided on the UAE instead.

585. Singh, 1999. This account suggests it was the to-and-fro of security forces in Amritsar that provoked the stabbing.

586. Editorial team, 1999h.

587. Editorial team, 1999v.

588. Interview, Gretchen Peters, Florida, June 2010.

589. Editorial team, 2000o.

590. Editorial team, 1999f.

591. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

592. Editorial team, 1999j; Unknown, 1999; Verma, 1999.

airport in Kabul[593] and called for a negotiation role for the United Nations and a team from India to solve the crisis.[594] A Taliban official interviewed on the runway in Kandahar just after the plane's arrival stated, "we are expecting that the Indians will come soon and take this situation seriously, but they are playing it very cool."[595]

The hijackers reportedly requested then that the plane be refuelled and flown out of Kandahar on to a new destination. The Indian pilots refused on the ground that it would be unsafe to fly to a new location without a thorough engineering inspection.[596] It was at this point that the hijackers went down into the hold of the plane and brought up bags filled with weapons.[597]

Abdul Hai Mutma'in's[598] statement at the time — "we [the Taliban] don't want to be blamed for anything"[599] — should be taken seriously. At the time, the Taliban faced severe international pressure over the issue of bin Laden, the treatment of women, human rights abuses, and the tactics used in their ongoing war with Massoud and his allies. A significant part of the leadership was keen to gain international recognition and establish relationships with foreign governments. These people understood the potential repercussions of being involved in a hijacking crisis and tried to mitigate the possible fallout.

This understanding informed their subsequent involvement in the events that unfolded, and in which they found themselves hosting the various international actors on the ground in Kandahar — most notably, the Indian negotiation team. The Taliban played an increasingly involved role in the negotiations process, even forcing some of the hijackers' demands off the table.[600] They denied the request for political asylum made by the hijackers, for example, along with their demand for the body of Sajjad Afghani on the grounds that both were un-Islamic. It is likely that many of the

593. Editorial team, 1999g.
594. Singh *et al.*, 1999.
595. *Air Hijack*, National Geographic documentary.
596. *Air Hijack*, National Geographic documentary.
597. *Air Hijack*, National Geographic documentary.
598. He was a Taliban spokesman.
599. Editorial team, 1999i.
600. Editorial team, 1999p.

decisions that the Taliban made regarding the hijacking were driven by the view that the outcome and its behaviour during the crisis could end up being another potential foreign policy disaster for the movement. They pursued a fast settlement and hoped to avoid bloodshed.[601]

The Taliban did, though, play a significant role in the negotiations. They limited India's options in how to deal with the crisis by denying them the possibility of military action, not merely by stating their opposition but by positioning forces around the aeroplanes.[602] Furthermore, from the beginning of the crisis they put pressure on India to fulfil the demands of the hijackers and speed up the negotiation process.[603] The information that is publicly available does not allow for a definitive assessment. It is, however, clear that the influence or the relationship between the Taliban and the hijackers was better than that of the Indian negotiators. The position of the Taliban appears to have been neutral or ambivalent at best and actively supportive of or sympathetic to the hijackers at worst.

The Taliban did have a real and significant prior relationship with *Harakat ul-Mujahedeen*. They operated jihadi training camps in southeastern Afghanistan during the 1990s, and they retained strong ties to both Haqqani and the southern leadership. Pakistani fighters affiliated with the group are widely reported to have taken part in the Taliban's attack on Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998.[604]

The primary interest of the Taliban leadership was to end the crisis without any casualties, though, and without committing to either side, in the hope that they would, that way, avoid any collateral damage for themselves. Mullah Mohammad Omar made a personal appeal to the hijackers for the release of one of the hostages whose husband had been killed earlier in the crisis.[605]

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601. Pais, 1999. ""We just do not want any catastrophe to happen on our land," says Abdul Hakim Mujahid. [...] "Besides, we don't encourage this kind of act, we do not support hijacking or violence against innocent people." Echoing his government's decision that the plane should leave Afghanistan soil, he said: "We will take any measure that is necessary to make sure the plane leaves our soil."" (Editorial team, 1999o).

602. Editorial team, 1999n; Gul, 2000.

603. Editorial team, 1999l.

604. Rashid, 2010, 74-75.

605. Editorial team, 1999m.

One passenger related how there was mistrust between the hijackers and the Taliban. The Afghans, sent into the plane to clean the toilets on December 28, were searched:

> *"The Afghan workers came to clean the toilets. But soon after they finished the hijackers became suspicious. They were lined up and thoroughly searched. Apparently the hijackers thought the Afghan government had sent a team of commandos to rescue the passengers."*[606]

This observation is confirmed by statements made by the Taliban leadership around the time that it would storm the plane if the hijackers started killing hostages.[607]

(ii) Aftermath

While many commentators and international governments at first praised the Taliban for their handling of the crisis[608] — some even approved of the Taliban stopping India from taking military action and possibly preventing a bloodbath — the movement's leadership soon began to face growing criticism.[609] In particular, the issue of the destination and free passage of the hijackers following the conclusion of the crisis was controversial.[610]

Neither the hijackers nor the freed prisoners were brought to justice for the hijackings. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh was later arrested and convicted for the murder of Daniel Pearl.[611] Massoud Azhar announced the formation of *Jaish-e Mohammad* a few weeks after his release; this group was soon joined by many members of other Pakistani

606. Ravikumar, 2000. Indeed, the Taliban had sent individuals close to the leadership to inspect the airline disguised as janitors and servicemen. (Interviews, 2013).

607. Editorial team, 1999l. ""We warned the hijackers that if they take any action or kill anyone on our territory we are going to mete out similar treatment to them," a Taleban spokesman said." (Filkins, 1999).

608. Editorial team, 2000f; Editorial team, 1999w; Editorial team, 1999s.

609. Editorial team, 2000i.

610. Editorial team, 1999x.

611. Rashid, 2008, Location 3767-70.

jihadi organisations. Note, also, that Azhar went back to Afghanistan to pay a visit to Mullah Mohammad Omar in either February or March 2000.[612]

Members of the Taliban claim they upheld the agreement that was reached by all parties, while others regarded this stance as support for the hijackers.[613] The Taliban's handling of the situation and the firing of an airport employee due to his repeated unauthorised public statements to journalists helps shed a little light onto the issue.[614] The Taliban regarded the hijacking as a chance to improve their foreign relations as much as they saw it as a danger for the same reasons. An editorial in *Shariat* newspaper while the hijacking was still underway noted that it was a "headache" for the Taliban government.[615]

Once the crisis was resolved, the Taliban clearly seem to have expected more international recognition for their role in bringing that conclusion:

> *"Let it be clear in regards to the incident of the Indian Airlines plane hijacking that the Afghanistan Islamic Emirate allowed the Indian plane to land at Kandahar airport at the request of India and it paved way for negotiation and agreement with consent of India's authorities so this act is directly connected to the politics of India and the Afghanistan Islamic Emirate played an important and positive role in solving this crisis due to its pro-humanity politics during which it maintained consent with the relevant sides even though the Emirate does not have diplomatic and political relations with India."*[616]

They continued to hold this position despite a number of missteps indicating their diplomatic and political experience. During the hijacking, they submitted an invoice to India for parking costs of the plane.[617] Following its resolution, they submitted another invoice to India for the mechanical repair of the engine.[618]

612. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.
613. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.
614. Editorial team, 2000g.
615. Editorial team, 1999r.
616. Editorial team, 2000b.
617. Editorial team, 1999t.
618. UN documents (author's copy).

(iii) Conclusion

The different positions that Taliban spokesmen and key actors took with regards to addressing and publicly explaining the situation are a clear indication of their ambivalence: they were improvising. Moreover, they tried too hard to be all things to all people. They sought to mitigate the adverse effects of the hijacking on their public image for the international community who were keenly watching; they also sought not to appear weak from an Islamic perspective in the face of a very vocal diplomatic and press corps (as mobilised by India); and they also seem to have come under some pressure from Pakistan towards the end of the crisis in finding a resolution that would allow Azhar to go free.[619] In these circumstances, their initial reaction was to try to get the plane to fly on to a new location so that they wouldn't have to deal with the problem.[620]

In this way, for the Taliban the Indian Airlines hijacking is a useful precedent for examining how they responded to these kinds of incidents — used by another group and caught by surprise, only to have to justify it and find itself at the centre of international attention for someone else's actions. Furthermore, the lack of any credible account of Taliban operations outside Afghanistan, their pre-occupation with their internal struggle and the absence of a strong motive to support the hijacking, are further indicators that shed doubt on the claim that the Taliban played a part in the hijacking.

The incident also neatly spotlighted the Taliban's conflicted agenda. A variety of imperatives motivated the various Taliban actors[621] and this diverging list was reflective of internal dynamics within the movement at the time. Above all, Mullah Mohammad Omar was conscious of his image as a Muslim for other Muslims around the world. There was clearly some attempt not to allow the hijacking to reflect badly

619. Interviews, June & July 2010.

620. Editorial team, 1999u; Editorial team, 1999q; Editorial team, 1999k.

621. One senior Taliban political figure extensively involved in the 1999 hijacking case remarked that there were three parts of the Taliban government involved: "the army (under Osmani), the airport staff (technical staff), and the diplomatic corps as represented by the ministry of foreign affairs." (Interview, Kabul, July 2010).

on the political Taliban's relations with other countries (both regional and those further afield). At the same time, the Taliban sought to salvage their media image (regardless of diplomatic or political considerations).[622] Initially, they portrayed their granting of permission to the plane to land as a humanitarian gesture:

> *"the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, due to its humanistic politics and to protect the passengers and crew of the plane and likewise upon request of India's official authorities, allowed an Indian Airlines airplane to land at the Kandahar International Airport as it was running out of fuel."*[623]

Then came their relationship with the whole host of Pakistani jihadi actors; Mullah Mohammad Omar was under pressure from these groups as well as sponsor-figures from within the Pakistani ISI throughout the crisis.[624] Finally, although this was not much of a consideration for the Taliban's leadership, there was some consideration for the movement's internal and domestic image among ordinary Afghans, although this was an extremely limited motivating factor.[625]

These conflicting imperatives for the Taliban highlight how the movement tried — as happened after the September 11 attacks — to be all things to all people, all too often lacking the understanding or the will to see the organisations and individuals involved for what they are.

(b) Bamiyan Buddhas (2001)

The Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas in March 2001 was by no means inevitable and foreseeable when the Taliban took power in Kabul in 1996. The case shows what happened when coordinated and forceful international pressure was directed at the Taliban government. While Mullah Mohammad Omar may have shown more flexibility were the matter taken out of the international spotlight — he was not certain

622. Interviews, Kabul, June and July 2010.
623. Editorial team, 1999h.
624. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, June and July 2010.
625. Joseph, 1999.

about taking a decision — in the end, his hand was forced and it became harder for him to back down.

As the Taliban took more territory, they confronted new aspects of Afghanistan's heritage. The greater Kandahar area was the location of a number of sites with pre-Islamic archaeological significance, but the Buddha statues in Bamiyan seemed to inflame the passions of purists within the movement, some of whom perhaps had absorbed some influences from the Salafism common among foreign fighters.

One Taliban commander, Abdul Wahed, had announced that he sought to destroy the statues in April 1997 as his forces were advancing on Bamiyan.[626] Local and international media outlets learned of this threat quickly and the Taliban were forced to issue a statement over the Radio on April 29 in which the matter was referred to higher authorities, taking the decision out of the hands of Abdul Wahed.[627] There had been reported instances of Taliban fighters destroying other statues and sculptures. In September 1998 when an Ismaili eagle was blown up in Baghlan province.[628] In November 1998, a "miscreant" Taliban soldier was jailed for damages inflicted on the Bamiyan statues.[629]

Later attempts to carry out the destruction of the statues were prevented when the Taliban-appointed governor of Bamiyan lobbied with Mullah Mohammad Omar to issue an edict of preservation.[630] This was published in March 2000 and stated that:

> *"Historic and cultural relics of Afghanistan cover periods of several thousand years and concern culture, religion and beliefs also of civilisations of earlier periods up through the course of history. Afghanistan's cultural heritage is very rich and of central importance lo the international arena. The government says that this heritage must be protected and preserved.*
>
> *"The famous Buddhist statues at Bamiyan were made before the event of Islam in Afghanistan, and are amongst the largest of their kind in Afghanistan and in the world. In Afghanistan there are no Buddhists to worship the statues. Since Islam came to Afghanistan until the present period the statues have not been damaged. The government regards the statues with serious respect and considers the position of their protection today to be the same as always. The*

626. Editorial team, 1997l.

627. Editorial team, 1997m.

628. Alam, 1998.

629. Editorial team, 1998f.

630. Semple, 2011b.

government further considers the Bamiyan statues as an example of a potential major source of income for Afghanistan from international visitors. Further, international Buddhist communities recently issued a warning that in case the Bamiyan statues are damaged, then mosques will be damaged in their regions. The Muslims of the world are paying attention to this declaration. The Taliban government states that Bamiyan shall not be destroyed but protected."[631]

This was a clear affirmation of the need to protect the statues. The issue had not escalated internationally and Mullah Mohammad Omar was able to exercise his authority despite misgivings of some within his government. He had support from various ministries in Kabul, notably that of the Ministry of Information and Culture as well as parts of the Foreign Ministry and various educational institutions. An oped was published in *Shariat* magazine in March 1997, for example, defending archeological artefacts as the "common wealth, cultural and historical support of the entire Afghan nation".[632] In July 2000, local government authorities in Kunar province were taking action to preventing the trade and excavation of antiquities (for selling across the border in Pakistan).[633]

By late February 2001, however, Mullah Mohammad Omar had shifted his opinion and issued an order for the destruction of all statues around the country. He was able to do this through the provision that earlier legislation had to "fulfil the precepts of the shari'a", so the new order was thus issued on the basis of a better understanding of what the shari'a considered proper with regard to the statues in Bamiyan. He instructed the *Amr bil Marouf* group to carry out the destruction of the statues.

Foreign intervention was immediate following the announcement of the new decision. Taliban ambassadors and representatives around the world were mobbed by international delegates and officials who sought to change the government's new policy. Lobbying took place on behalf of nations as well as institutions like UNESCO or the OIC, all of which seemed to believe that the matter was one ranging around ideological argument and thus if they were able to offer sufficient persuasion and argumentation then this would suffice for a reversal of the decision. These efforts

631. Unknown, 2000.

632. Editorial team, 1997a.

633. Editorial team, 2000e.

ranged from outright public condemnation to private conversations with Mullah Mohammad Omar himself, who seems to have been taken aback by the level of international interest in the matter, as were other officials.[634] Diplomats tasked with defending the official position of the movement were noted by United Nations delegates as being increasingly "defensive", even if it was clear that they disagreed with the application of this particular policy.[635] Maintenance of unity (and particularly, to be seen to do so) was the primary operating principle, however, so international engagement with officials of the Foreign Ministry, for example, seemed to fall on deaf ears. Coming on the heels of a series of standoffs with the international community, Mullah Mohammad Omar came to see the furore over the Buddha statues as yet another instance of "foreign interference". He had many advisors and visitors encouraging him to stand his ground against the international community, and the issue was thus escalated to something bigger than the specifics at hand.

Lobbying was not confined to formal international actors associated with governments and secular organisations. Muslims of various persuasions (representing themselves or formal institutions like the OIC) sought to influence Mullah Mohammad Omar once it became apparent that he would have to reaffirm his initial order issued in February 2001. The exact details of the various meetings that took place at the time are not as clear as that of the formal interventions since adequate records were not kept, but it seems clear that efforts were made. Several Pakistani clerics met with Mullah Mohammad Omar to convince him to stand fast, based less on Islamic arguments than political considerations about the Taliban movement's international standing.[636] A fatwa written by Sheikh Hamoud bin Uqla al-Shu'aybi, a Saudi cleric with a Wahhabi bent, in support of the destruction of the statues was published in a Pashto translation in *Shariat* newspaper, albeit after the act had already taken place.[637] One of Abu al-Walid al-Masri's books on the Arab militant presence in Afghanistan under the Taliban has also stated that pressure was directed towards the senior leadership to

634. Interview, Kabul, July 2013.

635. United Nations cable entitled "Edict on destruction of statues", March 2, 2001. (Author's copy).

636. Interviews, Kabul, June and July 2013.

637. Al-Shu'aybi, 2001.

make the issue a point of contention with international actors, further driving a wedge between the two and forcing a conflictual relationship.[638]

An Islamic argument against the destruction of the Buddha statues was made by delegates of several countries and organisations. Indeed, this was the effort on which most international actors involved at the time seemed to place their hopes.[639] Ulema'a from Qatar, Egypt and the UAE visited Kandahar and met with Mullah Mohammad Omar in person. These included Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi and Nasr, the Mufti of al-Azhar University in Cairo.[640] The Taliban's failure to engage with or defer to the opinions of these clerics was an important moment in that many of these mainstream clerics returned to their home countries and gave interviews questioning the Taliban's ability to make proper Islamic judgements:

> *"The Taleban ulema took the texts of the Koran and the Sunnah and wanted to apply them without really understanding their substance and the conditions in which they apply. However, because of their circumstances and their incomplete knowledge of jurisprudence they were not able to formulate rulings backed by theological evidence. The issue is a cultural issue. We detected that their knowledge of religion and jurisprudence is lacking because they have no knowledge of the Arabic language, linguistics, and literature and hence they did not learn the true Islam, in addition to the fact that the blockade imposed on their country has made them live in isolation from the world and particularly from the Islamic world."*[641]

On the other hand, Abu al-Walid al-Masri writes that the destruction of the Buddha statues was a clear catalyst that encouraged foreigners to come to Afghanistan to fight with the various Islamist militant groups based there.[642]

The volume of external lobbying efforts seemed to intensify the movement's internal discussion of the matter. The *Amr bil Marouf* were instructed to carry out the initial order, and they were disposed to act on it in any case. Mawlawi Mohammad Wali was

638. Hamid Mir has also been quoted as saying al-Zawahiri, in an interview, made a similar argument and confirming that he had sought to convince Mullah Mohammad Omar to destroy the statues. (Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 180).

639. United Nations cables and reports (Author's copy).

640. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

641. Wasil, 2001.

642. They had heard some of the Islamic objections to the Taliban movement voiced previously and the destruction of the statues seemed to be a sign that these were incorrect (Al-Masri, 2004).

head at the time and he strongly advocated for the destruction. The Ministry of Information and Culture sought to preserve the statues and thus tried to convince Mullah Mohammad Omar to rescind the order. The tension between these two poles became such in early March that the matter was referred to the Supreme Court, in part because the Taliban leader was not confident enough one way or the other.[643] The Supreme Court, with Nur Mohammad Saqib as its head, was also a natural ally to those who advocated the destruction, and thus the order was confirmed. An editorial in *Anis* newspaper made the argument a week later that the destruction of the statues should be seen as an act of *preserving* Afghan culture and not destroying it:

> *"The truth is that our history, civilisation and rich cultural values have no relationship to idols and Buddha statues. Our history, civilisation and cultural values are a collection of rich and proud values which link all of us, like an iron chain, to cooperation and national unity. The engraved writings from the Koshan era and other excavated relics can reflect such cultural links and the identity and existence of the Muslim people of Afghanistan in the Asian geography.*
>
> *"The idols and Buddha statues reflect the bitter reality of the past, showing how during the period of ignorance and superstition human beings relied on hollow and false beliefs. These idols were, in fact, a shameful blight on our honour and sacred Islamic faith. Therefore, the Islamic Emirate regarded the elimination and destruction of these idols as an internal and religious matter, treated the destruction of these idols as its essential duty, and in order to pay homage to monotheism and to respect the Islamic faith. By the destruction and elimination of these idols no damage will be inflicted on our cultural values; in reality such an action is a service to our cultural heritage and purification of our rich culture."*[644]

An article entitled "The Destruction of the Statues from an Islamic Perspective" in *Shariat* newspaper also stated that:

> *"these statues never belonged to the historical heritage of the country. Rather they are the symbols of infidelity and polytheism and their existence is contempt to the faithful and Muslim people of Afghanistan. […] We want to tell these people that heritage must be either material or spiritual, but in either case it must be a source of the pride of a nation. In fact a statue can never become a source of pride; rather it is the symbol of disgrace for Muslims. These statues were worshiped by polytheists and have nothing to do with the heritage of Muslims."*[645]

643. Interview (Kabul, June 2013); Muzhda, 2003.

644. Editorial team, 2001m.

645. Abdul Latif Akhundzada, 2001.

Diplomats working with the Taliban at the time have written about their actions during the crisis, claiming a mixture of the powerlessness of their particular office alongside a grudging and resigned acceptance of the final order of Mullah Mohammad Omar.[646]

The final decision seems to have come down to the wishes of Mullah Mohammad Omar, and once made, he characterised the decision as having been "in accordance with divine sanction".[647] He had developed a reputation as someone whose mind was impossible to change once a decision had been taken; Mutawakil had made much of this in media statements early on.[648] The international pressure — coupled with a sense of moral duty that some advisors worked hard to stoke at the time — meant that it was tough for him to rescind the order and save face. In the end, posterity mattered more than the present pressures, observing, "I am not the sculpture seller, I am the sculpture destroyer [*bot shakan*]."[649] He reportedly told three Pakistani visitors, including two senior clerics, that the delay in destroying the statues had been a cause of the country's drought; after the Buddhas were no more, it had started to rain, he said.[650]

By escalating the international intervention over the Buddha statues, Mullah Mohammad Omar had few opportunities to find a solution, even if he had been predisposed to do so. As it was, the international outcry combined with internal political calculations and the context of an already fractious relationship with political actors around the world meant that handing over the final decision to the Supreme Court was merely a way to get someone else to take the decision for him.

(c) Foreign Islamist groups (1996-2001)

The Taliban's evolving policies regarding the presence of foreign Islamist groups — some of whom were armed and sought to use Afghan soil to train their members — is

646. Muzhda, 2003; Mutawakil, 2007; Zaeef, 2010.
647. Editorial team, 2001d.
648. Interview (Kabul, June 2013); Interview (Kabul, May 2013).
649. Gutman, 2008, 238.
650. Editorial team, 2001n.

the preeminent case study of the movement's external interactions because so many relevant source materials have come to light. Anyone writing a memoir relating to that time seems to feel compelled to share whatever observations they may have had relating to diplomacy over bin Laden and the other foreign entities.[651]

The Taliban forced to deal with a variety of foreign governments over the matter of non-Afghan militancy and the approaches taken differed considerably, as we have already seen in the comparison between the United States and China. The tactics pursued pushed the Taliban in various directions during the years they held power, though ultimately the failure to take a decision or reach agreement meant that bin Laden had a base from which he could manage operations around the world.

(i) Inheriting bin Laden

The Taliban movement 'inherited' bin Laden when they entered and took control over the Jalalabad / Nangarhar area on September 11, 1996.[652] Bin Laden was not seen as a particularly problematic figure. Mullah Mohammad Omar was unaware of who bin Laden was and what his followers and wider network's objectives were.[653] Mullah Mohammad Omar seemed even unaware about the developments in the Arabic world, the various groups, organisations and their discussions.[654] They were soon disabused of that notion and had to get up to speed on international allegations that had followed the Saudi fugitive:

> *"In contrast to America and the rest of the world, the Taliban never considered Osama to be a serious problem or issue, and never conceived of him as such. The issue soon spiralled out of the control, however. An explosion near a commercial centre that killed 30 people in Saudi Arabia and the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen that killed 17 American soldiers lead to a further*

651. Faraj, 2002; Muzhda, 2003; Hamid, 2004; Bergen, 2006; Mutawakil, 2007; Nasiri, 2008; bin Laden *et al.*, 2010; Zaeef, 2010; Mohabbat and McInnis, 2011; Agha, 2014.

652. Interview, Kabul, June 2013. Atwan, 2006, 75.

653. Interview, Kabul, July 2010; Interview, Kandahar, August 2009.

654. Interview, Kabul, July 2010; Rashid, 2010, 60.

deterioration of the situation. Saudi Arabia increasingly involved itself, asking the US government to pressure the Taliban to hand over Osama or to drive him out of Afghanistan."[655]

While the core of the Taliban had little experience of foreign policy and/or the world outside Afghanistan, there were several individuals among them who did. During the 1980s, the Taliban had their own fund-raising delegates in the Gulf. Like much of the Pashtun population, many Taliban were subject to similar migration trends and had a basic understanding of the world. Many had travelled to Saudi Arabia for Hajj or Umra and had some experience of the world outside Afghanistan.

Abu al-Walid al-Masri relates how Saudi pressure on the Taliban movement was exerted almost immediately after Kabul came into their control:

"…the Saudi ambassador was already asking that bin Laden be surrendered in the name of the United States. The ambassador and the request were transferred to Kandahar since the matter fell under the prerogative of Mullah Omar. […] The ambassador assured the Prince [i.e. Mullah Mohammad Omar] that he was demanding Bin Laden's surrender to the United States. [Mullah Mohammad Omar] understood from what he said that Bin Laden was no longer a Saudi citizen after he was divested of his Saudi nationality and that he was not accused of any specific crimes against the United States. He thus failed to conceal his disdain toward Mr. Ambassador and began hating him on a personal level from that moment, because as [Mullah Mohammad Omar] said, he was working as America's ambassador instead of as Saudi Arabia's. He even told him with the blunt Kandahari honesty: "I will not surrender a Muslim to an atheist!" There is no doubt that this sentence decisively defined the fate of the relations between the United States and the Taliban movement."[656]

Bin Laden's first meeting with officials from the Taliban movement took place soon after the Taliban's capture of Jalalabad in the house of Mawlawi Yunis Khalis in which Mullah Ehsanullah Ehsan assured bin Laden that he would not be handed over to the United States even if it would mean sacrificing the Taliban. They would never hand over a fellow Muslim to non-Muslims, let alone a *mujahed* who had fought against the Soviet forces, they reportedly argued.[657]

655. Account written by senior Taliban figure (author's copy).

656. Al-Masri, 2004.

657. Interview, Kabul, July 2010. See also bin Laden *et al.*, 2010.

Physical points of interaction between the two groups were initially few. The Taliban in Jalalabad seem to have left bin Laden alone for the most part[658] but even when the Arabs moved down to Kandahar in early 1997, they kept mostly to themselves.

The first meeting between bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar took place in the "winter of 1996."[659] The Taliban leader took bin Laden to task over his media campaign — bin Laden had been busy in Jalalabad, issuing statements calling for a *jihad* against the United States in August 1996[660] — and warning him about the dangers of drawing too close to figures and groups within Pakistani jihadi circles.

A third point was allegedly covered: that of the presence of "Americans and Jews" in Saudi Arabia. Al-Masri says that bin Laden argued for the importance of expelling these from the Peninsula, but Mullah Mohammad Omar called for patience. The Taliban, he said, were busy with work within Afghanistan:

> ""*You and I are both Muslim mujahedeen: we are not cowards. After all, we fought the Soviets and sacrificed many martyrs until we defeated them and we will be with you in the battle to liberate the holy sites. That is our duty." But Mullah Omar added that the current situation did not allow the Taliban to join that fight yet since it firstly needed to establish itself in Afghanistan and to end the civil war in the country. He added, saying: "When we are well in place, we will be in the front lines with you in order to liberate our holy lands. You will see.""*[661]

Bin Laden was unused to having to play a subservient role, and tried once more to win the Taliban leader over to his ideas. After all, he had few other options for a country in which to find refuge:

> *"In that historic meeting between those two giants — or between the Qahtani and his victim, Mullah Omar — the first tried to get support for his private actions especially in regard to his media activities. He was very upset over the continuous pressure exerted on him by many officials in the Islamic Emirate to stop talking to the media, but Mullah Omar rejected his appeal firmly but politely. Bin Laden suggested that the Emir gives him the chance to talk to the*

658. This is also reflected in the account by bin Laden's son, Omar. See bin Laden *et al.*, 2010.

659. See Al-Masri, 2004 for full details. Al-Masri claims he attended the meeting.

660. Coll, 2005, 465.

661. Al-Masri, 2004.

media in order to explain why the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan was legitimate and by doing so, call on Muslim merchants to invest in it. The meeting lasted two hours after which the Emir asked his guest to abide by the decision taken by the Taliban officials and not to talk to the media. In the last seconds of the meeting and while bidding his guest farewell, Mullah Omar said: "Do not be sad, you are a mujahed and this is your country. You are most welcome here and you can do whatever you like". Bin Laden used that last sentence to act as if he had received a carte blanche from Mullah Omar to do whatever he wanted. In other words he considered that he had received the approval to talk to the Western media, convincing himself and those around him that this was true."[662]

The naiveté of the Taliban's senior leadership — and the reluctance of second-tier leaders to repeatedly and directly challenge Mullah Mohammad Omar on these issues — combined with bin Laden's motivation in the face of lack of alternative locations for consolidating his network, gave him significant room to argue, and exert pressure.

After the capture of Kabul, the relationship between the Taliban and the United States came to be dominated by the presence of foreign militant training camps inside Afghanistan's borders and by attempts to capture or otherwise deal with bin Laden. What had started out as cautious optimism degenerated into a fractious relationship between the two countries. Some senior foreign policymakers within the Taliban believe the differences between the two started from the very beginning. The US reportedly requested that their ambassador visit Kabul in 1996 after the Taliban captured it, but Mullah Mohammad Omar — anxious to avoid street chatter that the Taliban were a US-funded and outside-grown movement — turned them down.

In early 1997 American representatives requested to visit the training camps inside Afghanistan.[663] Mutawakil initially responded in the affirmative but stated that he would have to enquire with Kandahar. A few days later, Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil said that the meeting would be held after *ramadan*. This was followed by another call by Jalil postponing the visit for another two weeks due to heavy snowfall. In early March, a representative of the US was told by Taliban central shura member Mullah Ehsanullah Ehsan that the expulsion of bin Laden was not a solution. Camp, the US

662. Al-Masri, 2004; Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

663. US Department of State, 2001.

official, reminded Ehsan about the promised visit to the militant training camps that had been reportedly closed by the Taliban. Subsequently, Deputy Chief of Mission Holzmann advised Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Mufti Afghani, that they should immediately expel bin Laden. After consulting with Kandahar, the Ambassador reiterated Ehsan's statement and took back the offer for a visit to the camps.

While individual meetings between official Taliban representatives and US officials remained cordial for the most part, public communication on both sides deteriorated into open accusations, often based on misunderstandings or misrepresentations of what had happened during meetings.

> *"Miss [Robin] Raphael came as the head of a US delegation to Kandahar. We held good relations with her and her staff in a peaceful manner. Everyone on our [Taliban] side became very hopeful and happy. 'Now,' they would say, 'we have an understanding and maybe we will even get official recognition from America.' We were really that hopeful, but when they left the next day we read in the newspaper that actually there was no good relationship and that the meeting had apparently gone badly after all. These kind of things confused and disappointed us."*[664]

The Taliban continued to reiterate their position on bin Laden. A handover, they said, would damage their reputation, would cause considerable internal problems and would run against Afghan hospitality. The argumentation, however, appeared to be dependent on the individual who made it, a function of the growing distance between the central leadership and its Foreign Affairs officials. Communications continued and the Taliban attempted to find a solution that would allow them to save face. Their initial response, apart from denying that bin Laden was involved in 'international terrorism', was to claim that they had him 'under control'. This was unsatisfactory for the United States.

The first two years of bin Laden's presence in the country did not challenge the Taliban's ability to defend and argue against international interlocutors who demanded he be handed over, though, since up to this point there had been no significant

664. Interview, Kabul, May 2013.

international actions undertaken by al-Qaeda. That would all change with the 1998 bombing of two United States embassies in Africa, but to begin with the Arabs were still seen as relatively benign by the Taliban leadership.[665]

Bin Laden's move down to Kandahar, however, and occupation of derelict and shoddy compounds in March 1997 saw a growing closeness between him and Mullah Mohammad Omar. The important Islamic holidays, for example, were occasions when bin Laden would visit Mullah Mohammad Omar to congratulate him.[666] Mullah Mohammad Omar was grateful for the Arab help in defending the north of Kabul, and there seemed to be a natural respect granted to bin Laden. He could still play on the myth of his exploits during the Afghan *jihad*. His very presence in Afghanistan, having travelled from Saudi Arabia and left behind a life of luxury to dedicate his life to *jihad* and Islam, made a big impression on the Taliban leader, no matter how much his vision and interpretations may have differed from those of the Taliban in general.[667]

The visits of Mullah Mohammad Omar to bin Laden's residence during early 1997, however, seem to have been aimed at encouraging the Arabs to start some programmes of work and knowledge transfer within the country. Indeed, many within the Taliban movement had at least some hope that the Arabs would bring money and expertise with them which would help in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.[668] Bin Laden, though, had neither money nor the focus to start rebuilding Afghanistan.

(ii) 1998

In May 1998, matters came to a head for the Taliban and bin Laden. The latter had publicly announced the formation of a "World Islamic Front Urging Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders" and this widely-publicised media event angered the Taliban considerably.[669] Mullah Mohammad Omar and his senior political advisors had hoped

665. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, June and July 2010.
666. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 245. Also, interviews, Kandahar, 2009-10.
667. Interviews, Kandahar, July 2010.
668. Interview, London, January 2010. Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.
669. Gutman, 2008, 129.

he would keep his promise of making no statements as long as he remained a guest of the Taliban:

> *"It also angered the Taliban Movement and especially the anti-Bin Laden wing, resulting in a feud between Kabul and Kandahar. Mullah Omar found himself alone with no one supporting him, since he was perceived by the Taliban Shura members as being weak and unable to impose his authority on Bin Laden. A question was even raised regarding who truly ruled Afghanistan: Bin Laden or Mullah Omar?"*[670]

One Taliban member present in Khost at the time also felt it was a bad decision to hold the conference:

> *"The Khost conference was a big event. I was there in Khost when it happened, together with Khairullah Khairkhwa, the Taliban minister of the interior, and we were quite unhappy because we (and the other Talibs) thought that Osama was trying to bring all the world's enmity onto the Afghans. They even distributed books against the Saudi government on the eve of the conference. This tells us that the coalition of the Taliban and Osama did not actually exist."*[671]

Mullah Mohammad Omar was reportedly apoplectic. "How can he hold a press conference without my permission? There is only one ruler. Is it me or Osama?" Rahimullah Yousufzai recalls Mullah Mohammad Omar saying in a phone call after he learnt what had happened.[672] The Taliban leader closed down Khalden camp at this point as well as the ones operated by Pakistani groups.[673] Bin Laden had held his press conference at Jihad Wal camp, in defiance of the Taliban's constant denials that such camps even existed.[674]

In June 1998, Prince Turki al-Faisal arrived in Afghanistan for a discussion with Mullah Mohammad Omar over what to do with bin Laden. He reportedly received a pledge that "enough is enough" and was asked that a joint Islamic commission be set

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670. Al-Masri, 2004.

671. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

672. Cullison and Higgins, 2001; Wright, 2006, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 9031-9043.

673. Lia, 2009, 287.

674. See, for example, Editorial team, 2001s.

up to legitimise the expulsion.[675] In July, Mutawakil travelled to Saudi Arabia to confirm the deal. In preparation, a Wall Street Journal article reported, "the Taliban replaced bin Laden's team of Arab bodyguards with Afghans loyal to Mullah Omar."[676]

On August 7, 1998, two near-simultaneous bombs struck American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Close to 300 people were killed — mostly Kenyans and Tanzanians — and over 4000 were injured. Bin Laden had followed up on his threats and statements and had finally struck against the United States of America.[677]

Some figures among the Taliban movement became increasingly vocal about the problems that bin Laden was causing for their international legitimacy. Three figures were at the centre of this dissent from the beginning: Mutawakil, Mullah Mohammad Khaksar and Mullah Mohammad Rabbani.[678]

Mullah Mohammad Khaksar had met bin Laden in 1996 already, just after the al-Qaeda head had arrived in Afghanistan. Khaksar was deputy interior minister at this time, and met bin Laden together with Mullah Mohammad Rabbani:

> *"I told bin Laden "It is time for you people to leave our country. Of course there are some differences among Afghans, but it's our internal issue and in the course of time we will solve these problems." This meeting caused tension between me and Osama, and we were not to see each other again. At that time, Mullah Rabbani told me to leave the session. I never met bin Laden again. […] No one wants a guest to hurt the honour of the house From time to time I was telling Mullah Omar, "Look, Mullah Sahib, there is no need for Osama to stay in Afghanistan. It will hurt our country." My position about bin Laden is why the Taliban leaders had lots of problems with me."*[679]

This group later coalesced around Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, but during the last months of 1996 and the first few of 1997 the key figure seemed to be Mullah Mohammad Hassan. Bin Laden was, he argued, "directing" Taliban foreign policy with

675. Coll, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 7802-7815.

676. Cullison and Higgins, 2001.

677. Coll, 2005, 124.

678. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, 2009-10.

679. Bergen, 2006, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 4386-8.

his media speeches and remarks and this was doing the movement no favours.[680] Abu al-Walid reports bad feeling towards bin Laden and his entourage were rife during this period. One rumour apparently went round the Taliban ranks that bin Laden had given an American envoy the opportunity to come scout for targets and to examine the possibility of striking at the Taliban movement.[681]

The Taliban reaction at the time seems to have been one of major concern.[682] The 'political' Talibs — i.e. those who had already voiced their concern over the presence of bin Laden — were worried that the United States would now use bin Laden as a scapegoat for any future attacks on the United States. Others, who weren't sure whether bin Laden was responsible, said that if he was it would be a catastrophe for the movement. The subsequent cruise missile strikes — 79 in total — on August 20 offered conclusive proof of their position.[683] Bin Laden was, they believed, a strategic liability for the movement and they sought to convince Mullah Mohammad Omar of this.[684]

The US embassy attacks in Africa on August 7, 1998, and the subsequent cruise missile strike by the United States targeting training camps in eastern Afghanistan was a pivotal turning point. The attack confirmed already-lingering attitudes among the Taliban leadership in Kandahar.

> *"This attack was not against Osama bin Laden, rather it was against the Afghan nation and it shows the US enmity towards Afghan people," angered Mulla Muhammad Omar told Afghan Islamic Press from Kandahar on phone. "We already had close downed his (Osama) camps and offices in Afghanistan. Now he has no camp in Afghanistan. We clarified earlier several times that no one was allowed to use our soil against anyone. We strongly condemned this attack," he added."*[685]

680. Al-Masri, 2004.

681. Al-Masri, 2004.

682. Interviews, Kandahar and Kabul, June/July 2010.

683. Levine, 2007, Location 5609.

684. Interviews, Kandahar and Kabul, June/July 2010.

685. Editorial team, 1998n.

The Afghan Islamic Press would run another article the following day quoting Mullah Mohammed Omar stating that there was no difference between the attacks on the US embassies and the missile strikes on Afghanistan. He would go on, criticising the UN: "Why not it condemned US air strike against Afghanistan, it show that UN was not world body rather a puppet organization of United States."[686]

The exact chain of events that saw bin Laden apologise to Mullah Mohammad Omar and pledge his obedience is unclear. There are various accounts of what transpired in the meeting, but the most detailed is to be found in the autobiography by bin Laden's son, Omar, who claims to have been present at the meeting.[687]

Bin Laden tried to seem contrite, putting on a feast for the visiting Taliban leader — apparently "the first time that Mullah Omar had left his home to pay my father a visit"[688] — but this did not work. Mullah Mohammad Omar sat at the opposite end of the garden, far away from bin Laden, and addressed him in Pashto:

> *"The Taliban leader was displeased at my father's militant activities. Concerned only with the internal affairs of Afghanistan, Mullah Omar had no desire to attract interference from the outside world. […] "The political situation is heated," Mullah Omar concluded. "It is best if you and your men leave Afghanistan."*[689]

This was clearly the last thing that bin Laden wanted to be hearing at this point, and he made an impassioned plea for clemency to Mullah Mohammad Omar, citing the various times he had come to the Taliban's assistance, ending with the clincher: To which Mullah Mohammad Omar responded:

> *"Sheik, if you give in to the pressure of infidel governments, your decision will be against Islam."*[690]

686. Editorial team, 1998o.
687. Muzhda, 2003; Wright, 2006; bin Laden *et al.*, 2010.
688. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 245.
689. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 246-247.
690. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 247.

To which Mullah Mohammad Omar responded:

> *"Sheik Osama, I will fulfill your request. I will give you the same courtesy as did the Sudanese government. You have my invitation for another year and then a half a year. During that year and another half year, make arrangements for your move. Do find another country for your family."*[691]

With this, bin Laden won another reprieve, and time with which to win over the Taliban leader. He would be helped during this time by an increasingly confrontational international diplomacy by the United States and others that was turning more and more into a zero-sum game. Negotiations over bin Laden, in particular, seemed to go in circles.[692]

Mullah Mohammad Omar called the US State Department two days after the African embassy bombings. He lectured the representative on the other end of the phone in Washington, saying that he had seen no evidence that bin Laden was behind the attacks.[693] The call seems to have been otherwise mundane in content — aside from its occurring at all — but it opened up a channel for communication over issues. There were other matters to bring up, but bin Laden was the main priority for the United States — and 1998 and 1999 saw an increase of meetings between US representatives and members of the Taliban.

In late August 1998, Mullah Mohammad Omar was reported to have called on bin Laden to refrain from his "threatening statements" against Americans:

> *"I sent a message to Bin Laden yesterday making it clear to him not to make military and political statements against anyone from our soil. [...] I am angry because Osama is making anti-American statements from our soil and I stressed on him not to do so. [...] He has broken his promise of not using our soil for making such statements because he had been stopped from doing so in the past as well."*[694]

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691. bin Laden *et al.*, 2010, 247. The outlines of this meeting are also confirmed in Al-Masri, 2004.

692. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

693. National Security Archive, 1998b.

694. Editorial team, 1998p.

Bin Laden's threat would be brushed aside by the Taliban in public, however, arguing that he had not been involved or that he had been pressured into making statements by journalists.[695] On December 8, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1214. Article 13 of the resolution read:

> *"13. Demands also that the Taliban stop providing sanctuary and training for international terrorists and their organizations, and that all Afghan factions cooperate with efforts to bring indicted terrorists to justice"*[696]

Part of the Taliban's leadership understood the consequences of the sanctions, but this did not translate into a change in the Taliban's stance or behaviour. Reportedly the US submitted three suggestions to deal with the issue in early 1999:

> *"AIP learnt through reliable sources that the US had set three proposals regarding Osama including; Osama should be handed over to US by Taliban government in Afghanistan and if it is not possible for them he (Osama) be deported to his native country Saudi Arabia and if it is also not possible Osama should be expelled from Afghanistan."*[697]

The Taliban rejected these suggestions. Subsequent meetings saw little movement between the two parties. The Taliban demonstrated no movement on the issue. On October 15, 1999, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1267 that explicitly demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden. The exact text, however, read:

> *"...demands that the Taliban turn over Usama bin Laden without further delay to appropriate authorities in a country where he has been indicted, or to appropriate authorities in a country where he will be returned to such a country, or to appropriate authorities in a country where he will be arrested and effectively brought to justice;"*[698]

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695. US Department of State, 2001.

696. United Nations Security Council, 1998.

697. Editorial team, 1999a.

698. United Nations Security Council, 1999.

In response, Abdul Hakim Mujahid submitted two proposals:

> *"The first was that the Taliban would confine UBL in Afghanistan under supervision of the OIC, NAM or the UN. Inderfurth rejected this proposal and noted that it did not meet UNSCR 1267's requirements."*[699]

August 1998 was a turning moment for the Taliban leader. The Saudi Prince, Turki al-Faisal, had visited Mullah Mohammad Omar in June and had a reportedly productive and frank conversation about bin Laden.[700] Mullah Mohammad Omar was frustrated by his guest but needed a face-saving mechanism that would allow him to defend himself against accusations of being 'un-Islamic'. The outlines of an agreement were reached, and Saudi Arabia reportedly sent 400 four-wheel-drive pickup cars and cash to fund the Taliban's upcoming northern offensive as a de facto downpayment to confirm the agreement.[701]

Prince Turki returned in August (after the bombings and the cruise missile strikes), reportedly to collect bin Laden and bring him back to Saudi Arabia. Mutawakil had visited Saudi Arabia in July to confirm the outlines of the agreement and to ensure that the Saudi offer of a religious panel which would condemn bin Laden and his activities was serious. In the August meeting, also attended by ISI chief General Naseem Rana, Mullah Mohammad Omar reneged on his promise.[702]

Mullah Mohammad Omar reportedly replied that the Taliban had no intention of turning bin Laden over to Saudi Arabia. He further stated that the Saudi government was 'illegitimate' because it had allowed American troops to remain in Saudi Arabia. He even claimed that the Saudi government was planning to allow the United States to occupy the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina. They had no business interfering in

699. US Department of State, 2001.

700. Coll, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 7802-7815.

701. Wright, 2006, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 268.

702. There are two publicly available accounts of this meeting: one is the interviews given by Turki al-Faisal to journalists in subsequent years, and then the one printed in Murshed, 2006, 300.

Afghan matters and the *umma* would rise against it, he said.[703] In the words of one Taliban attendee at the meeting:

> *"Mullah Mohammad Omar started his own comments. He started with Saddam Hussein, saying that 'your family are afraid of Saddam Hussein! Saddam was a communist and he was not a good person. His presence in Iraq caused the presence of America in the region and it is because of the American presence in the region that we have all these problems now. But your father and his father were not like you...they were sahib and they expanded Islam all over. But you are not doing the same thing.' Mullah Omar wanted to give him his own ideas, but Turki could not tolerate this and he left the meeting."*[704]

Prince Turki was angry about this reversal; the Saudi government announced on September 22 that it was recalling its *charge d'affaires* in Kabul and expelled the Taliban representative, Shahabuddin Dilawar, from Saudi Arabia. A final pressure point seems to have been used: the Saudi government threatened to withdraw permission for Afghans to make the *Hajj* pilgrimage.[705]

The fallout with Saudi Arabia appears to have caused a wider split within the Taliban. Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, who was known to have close ties to Saudi Arabia, was angered over Mullah Mohammad Omar's treatment of Prince Turki and rumours about a possible coup against Mullah Mohammad Omar were heard in Kabul at the time.[706]

The Taliban leadership reached out to its other allies, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. Mullah Mutawakil travelled to Abu Dhabi to ensure that relations would not be further downgraded. It was around this time that Pakistani officials also made independent enquiries with Mullah Mohammad Omar about the possibility of finding a solution to the bin Laden problem:

> *"Ziauddin recalls going to meet Omar and asking him to send away his dangerous guest. [...] He found Omar reluctant at first but found some give in his position later on. 'He is like a bone stuck in my throat, I can't swallow it nor can I get it out!' explained Omar. When Ziauddin*

703. National Security Archive, 1998c.

704. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

705. As reported in Al-Masri, 2004.

706. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, June/July 2010. Also see National Security Archive, 1998c.

asked Omar whether it was the money that Bin Laden gave the Taliban that made Omar 'beholden' to him, suggesting that, if that was the case, alternative sources of financing could perhaps be found. Omar responded in Pashto: Da mata ywa rupay na rakarray de! ('He hasn't given me even one rupee!' [...]). 'My people will lynch me if I hand him over. He is a hero!'"[707]

Mullah Mohammad Omar's stance on bin Laden[708] seemed, however, to be unchanged, in particular with regards to his rhetoric that the Saudi government was opposed to the *umma*, a view that seemed not to be shared by other senior Taliban leaders. During the years of their rule, the Taliban had a broadly positive attitude towards the Saudi government and *ulemaa*', incidents like the one above notwithstanding.

There seems to have been a reaction on Mullah Mohammad Omar's part, though, to the claim that the Taliban could not control bin Laden that led to clear restrictions being applied at this point; a group of ten Taliban guards were appointed to stay close to bin Laden and watch over him at all times, and (in February 1999) his communications equipment was confiscated. In general, the Taliban communicated a very stern warning that bin Laden was to keep a low profile from this point on.[709]

As often, the actions and the statements of the Taliban conflicted. Putting bin Laden under closer restrictions seemed to be a direct concession to Saudi Arabia while an apology for Mullah Mohammad Omar's treatment of Prince Turki appears to have been out of the question. A possible explanation, however, is that the restrictions — as much as other policies applied to the issue of bin Laden — were an effort to appease internal factions of the Taliban, that delivering him would not be Islamic, the argument ran, while demonstrating that he would be controlled and forced to respect the sovereignty of the Taliban leadership.

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707. Nawaz, 2008, 536-537.

708. Murshed has stated, though, that Mullah Mohammad Omar told him "on several occasions [around that time] in [his] capacity as the leader of the shuttle mission for promoting an intra-Afghan dialogue that [Omar] wanted to get rid of Bin Laden but did not know how" (Murshed, 2010).

709. National Security Archive, 1998a.

(iii) 1999-2001: Growing closer?

Many within the Taliban movement continued to seek international recognition. In particular, political Taliban officials who joined the movement after Kabul had fallen point to the inexperience of the political apparatus in their continued effort to engage the international community. They were trying to convince governments, the United States specifically, not to isolate the Taliban but to engage them and establish formal working relations that would help shape the future of the government.[710] If only, they argued, some more countries could offer official diplomatic recognition then the movement would finally be able to deal with the variety of social and political problems within the country.[711]

Bin Laden was not the only issue that confronted the Taliban's government at the time. The movement's harsh social policies — most of all, their attitudes to girls and women — had attracted international attention and there were several lobby groups devoted to bringing this to the attention of policymakers in Washington. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was especially vocal on this point, saying on November 19, 1997, that "we are opposed to the Taliban because of their opposition to human rights and their despicable treatment of women and children and great lack of respect for human dignity."[712]

In March 1998, Mavis Leno testified on the treatment of women in Afghanistan before Senator Diane Feinstein of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.[713] During the same month, British Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, and European Commissioner Emma Bonino called for internationals to mark International Women's Day by taking a stand against "gender apartheid" in Afghanistan.[714] In May 1998, French fashion magazine Elle announced it would be priced at one franc higher than the usual retail price to help raise money for the

710. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.
711. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.
712. Rashid, 2010, 65.
713. http://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/mavis-leno (accessed June 15, 2010)
714. Editorial team, 1998h.

women of Afghanistan.[715] In July 1998, the European Union froze funding of humanitarian aid projects in Kabul because of the Taliban's adverse treatment of women. The suspension of aid covered about $4 million, or 40 percent of all aid the European Union had earmarked for Afghanistan over the next 12 months.[716] There were many other such interventions over the Taliban's treatment of women during this period.

Bin Laden's August attacks had made the Taliban movement more of a liability for international business partners — for US oil company UNOCAL, for example — and the movement's inability to take the north made it difficult for the oil pipeline project to move forward.

UNOCAL had been involved in preparing for a project that would see the installation of an oil pipeline bringing oil deposits from Central Asia (the Caspian Sea area) via Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean.[717] These efforts had begun in the early 1990s when a new oil boom erupted in Central Asia; exploration rights to Yashlar in eastern Turkmenistan were signed to Bridas in January 1992 and Keimir in February 1993.[718] UNOCAL was founded in 1890, operating in the United States for the most part until the 1930s when they began drilling for oil in Australia.[719] The company brought a mix of high-reaching political connections, investment capital and the knowledge that their agenda matched a larger national agenda of the United States government.[720]

The Taliban members and leadership who had some contact with foreign representatives and the world outside Afghanistan had a sense of how badly the 'Emirate' was perceived and where the damage was being inflicted. Unsurprisingly, most placed the blame at the feet of the international community.

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715. Editorial team, 1998l.

716. Editorial team, 1998m.

717. Coll, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 5927-5939.

718. http://www.worldpress.org/specials/pp/pipeline_timeline.htm (accessed June 1, 2010).

719. http://web.archive.org/web/20020808053241/www.unocal.com/aboutucl/history/index.htm (accessed August 18, 2010).

720. Coll, 2005, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 6019-6069.

Inside the country, there was very little consideration of the damage being done (on account of their social policies) which lead to an increase in conspiracy theories as to why the international community had failed to bestow diplomatic recognition and why the United Nations seemed to be stuck in a rut of confrontation with the Taliban government. Many blamed America, whom, they believed, was actively involved in preventing countries from officially recognising the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.[721]

Domestic problems, in turn, began to be blamed on the foreigners. If the international community came on board and helped provide humanitarian and other urgent support to the Taliban, the argument ran, then they would finally be able to start moving forward with improvements to the lives of the people and, they still continue to argue, they could finally provide schooling for girls and find a way to normalise and legislate the presence of women in the workplace.[722]

Similarly with the Taliban's counter-narcotics efforts: the Taliban felt that they had, at least by 2000, delivered on their promises to tackle the problem of opium cultivation but that they were then offered no support from the international community.[723] Of course, those involved in the opium trade — and there were links into the Taliban's leadership — benefited from the ban of 2000 since prices rocketed; many of these were reported to have stockpiled supplies before the ban's full implementation.[724]

In September 1999, Mullah Mohammad Omar wrote a letter to US president Clinton. The letter was written in language sufficiently undiplomatic that the Taliban's envoy did not want to pass it on to the State Department, but it clearly stated that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan had no intention of meddling in other countries' affairs and wanted good relations with the United States of America.[725]

721. Interview, Kabul, July 2010.

722. Interviews, Kabul, June/July 2010.

723. "From 3,276 tonnes of opium in 2000, production fell dramatically to 185 tonnes in 2001" (MacDonald, 2007, 78).

724. Interviews, Kandahar and Kabul, summer 2010.

725. Interview, Kabul, July 2010; for a translation of Mullah Mohammad Omar's letter to President Clinton, dated 6 September 1999 see Murshed, 2006, 310.

"Ours and your Almighty God has obliged us to serve our religion. We are not mad nor are we in love with power. We are in the service of God and that is why we are strict on our position. If you have any objection to anything we do, you should look at our deeds in the light of Islam (whether they are according to Islamic principles) and if they are in accordance with Islam - you should know that that is why we have to follow this path, how indeed could we change it? Please be a little fair.

Much is going on in the world. And it is possible that your strict position regarding us might be flawed. So let me bring another point to your attention and it is this: if we were overthrown, there would be major chaos and confusion in the country and everyone including every single oppressed individual would blame you for it."[726]

It seems that even at this point the Taliban wanted to find some way to interact usefully with the United States and their other international interlocutors, especially over the issue of bin Laden.

The Taliban saw themselves cornered by international policy, however, which in turn reinforced their stubbornness and alienated potential allies. By the end of the 1990s, most of the leadership in Kandahar were convinced that the United States wanted to dispose of the Taliban, no matter what was suggested. They reiterated their suggestion of a trial in Afghanistan. The US would submit evidence and the OIC would monitor bin Laden's activities.[727]

US Undersecretary Pickering met with Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil in May 2000 and presented evidence tying bin Laden to the African embassy bombing, but the Taliban rejected the evidence.[728] The rest of the year would see a repetition of the US demanding the Taliban's compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1267, whereas the Taliban reiterated their suggestion of holding a trial in Afghanistan.

The idea that America was never interested in achieving any working agreement with the Taliban and that there were simply too many differences to be resolved had started to achieve real currency among the leadership by this point.

726. Murshed, 2006, 310-311.

727. Editorial team, 2000a.

728. US Department of State, 2001.

"America has an issue with anyone who doesn't accept their policy and what they say. If you are aggressive, the America leaves you alone, but if you are weak and you don't accept the wishes or orders of the Americans then you'll have problems."[729]

An editorial in *Shariat* newspaper entitled "The logical stance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in talks with the high-ranking American delegation" published in January 2000, stated that it was the unreasonable policies of the international community that were causing dialogue to fail:

"What was interesting in the course of these talks was the acknowledgements of the logical and realistic stance of the IEA by the American side. The talks proved that if the international community in general and the government of the United States of America in particular pursue a logical approach, based on realities, in removing misunderstandings with the IEA, they would be inevitably obliged to acknowledge the stance of the IEA.

The international opponents of the IEA know that considering their unfounded allegations against the IEA they will never achieve success in the arena of negotiations and reasoning. Therefore, they are resorting to unrealistic and unsound methods in an effort to force the Afghan mujahed nation to accept their illegitimate demands. Such methods and approaches in this time and age, when the world has entered the 21st century, are unworthy and unacceptable. Today the people of the world deserve to live in reasonable and sound conditions and do not want to act contrary to the demands of diplomatic art and logic."[730]

The Taliban expressed hopes that the issue would find a peaceful solution with a new American government led by the Republican Party and President George W. Bush, even though several individuals tried to impress on them that the incoming American leadership would be less willing to settle the issue through dialogue.[731] By the end of the year, rumours of a US invasion were circulating inside Afghanistan. UN Resolution 1333 was adopted, intensifying the sanctions on the Taliban. The group within the Taliban that opposed the presence of bin Laden and his acolytes grew closer

729. Interview, Kabul, June 2013.

730. Editorial team, 2000h.

731. "If Mr. Bush wants to adopt the path of reason and reality the Islamic Emirate is ready for such a compromise, including the issue of Osama, which will at the same time keep the honour of the American people and will also not harm the religious and national principles of Afghans. We will see which course Mr. Bush will follow" (Editorial team, 2001c).

together during this period, partly as a result of being increasingly shunned by the Kandahar core leadership and Mullah Mohammad Omar himself.

Their objections were not a simply pragmatic response to international pressure — although pragmatism formed a central core of their calculations — but a considered response to his statements and actions. Bin Laden was not in Afghanistan because he wanted to help the Taliban, they believed, but for his own purposes. This was clearly demonstrated to them in the years leading up to the September 11 attacks, not just in the aftermath of September 2001.[732]

They were also restrained by the internationals' engagement on the issue of bin Laden to offer them a face-saving mechanism to present to the Taliban leader. Mullah Zaeef has told of the variety of suggestions that he offered on behalf of the movement as possible ways of dealing with bin Laden — international courts, legal proceedings and so on — but all these were rejected and not regarded as sincere.[733]

The final straw for this group were the United Nations-led sanctions that were adopted by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 on October 15, 1999. The resolution put sanctions on individuals associated with bin Laden, al-Qaeda and/or the Taliban.[734] The group and their opposition were effectively silenced; they lost their leverage over the Taliban leader who by this point was convinced of an international Judeo-Christian conspiracy against his 'Emirate' and who felt surrounded by 'enemies.'[735] Many senior figures had started to believe that other countries — particularly the United States — were insincere in their negotiations, and that there was a long list of demands that would effectively never end.[736] A belligerent editorial in *Ettefaq-e Islam* newspaper published in November 1999 railed:

> *"Using its political influence, the United States forced the UN Security Council to embark on such unwarranted, uncalculated and unjust action, under the pretext of the presence of the*

732. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, 2008-2010.

733. Zaeef, 2010, 136-139.

734. United Nations Security Council, 1999.

735. Interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, June/July 2010.

736. See an editorial published in *Shariat* newspaper in October 1999, for example, entitled "Even if Osama leaves the country, the line of American excuses will still remain long" (Editorial team, 1999b).

jihadi personality, Osama bin Ladin in Afghanistan and his non-extradition to the United States, thus displaying once again its colonial policy against the diligent Muslim people of Afghanistan. The United States is now more than any other time demonstrating openly its animosity against our free-born and brave people. […]

The Muslim people of Afghanistan, with bare feet and hungry stomachs, have stood up many times and embarked on jehad against the aggressors and bullying powers. With the help of Almighty God, they have come out victorious from all these historic battles. God willing, this time too, they will successfully and with honour pass this test as well. They will never give up the principles of their belief, their national traditions and jihadi honours, and will never surrender to anyone."[737]

By 2000, following the Indian Airlines hijacking, the Taliban seemed to be at a point of no return with regards to international recognition. None of the gestures that the Taliban were prepared to offer was met with any serious discussion, it seemed to them, and so it was in the second week of January that the Taliban hosted a delegation from Chechnya.[738] The Chechens had apparently been baying at the doors of the Taliban government for several years but it was only in January that they finally received an invitation and participated in a series of meetings in Kabul. Their earlier visit had apparently failed because of the Taliban's sensitivity to the international community:

"During a cabinet session, the members agreed that the Chechen Republic should be recognised. This was communicated to Kandahar. Kandahar in returned ordered the Chechen delegation to take the next morning's Ariana flight to Kandahar. They did so and met in Kandahar with Mullah Omar. But we were soon informed that since there is a lot of tension between the Taliban and the international community, the recognition would have to be postponed to a later date. Disappointed, the Chechen delegation returned home."[739]

In January 2000, though, official recognition was extended to the Chechen government and diplomatic representatives would be dispatched to both Kabul and Grozny.[740]

737. Editorial team, 1999d.

738. Gutman, 2008, 192-193; Muzhda, 2003.

739. Muzhda, 2003.

740. The Chechen delegation are reported to have gone on a tour round Afghanistan on behalf of the Taliban, even receiving four 'Stinger' missiles in Herat in recognition of their fighting against Russian troops (Muzhda, 2003).

By this point, most discussions about bin Laden seemed — to the Taliban's diplomatic corps — somewhat staged and well-rehearsed. On August 2, 2001, for example, US Assistant Secretary of State, Christina Rocca, met with Mullah Zaeef in Islamabad and broached the issue but neither Rocca nor Zaeef emerged from the meeting with any sense that the other had responded. Zaeef later wrote that "she flouted every diplomatic principle, and every single word she uttered was a threat, hidden or open", but she suggested in a statement that Zaeef had not listened to her arguments.[741]

Within the Taliban, the sparse continued resistance to the presence and activities of the foreign jihadists that had expressed itself faltered with the death of Mullah Mohammad Rabbani on April 16, 2001. Their group was left without much of a voice, already sidelined and away from the centre of power in Kandahar.[742]

There were other signs of conflict between the two groups during this period. Murshed claims that Mullah Mohammad Omar started a process to try to deal with bin Laden during mid-2000 but this was also at a time when the Taliban closed down several of the training camps: the Taliban "ordered its training camps to be brought under the control of the Afghan Defense Ministry, which subsequently amalgamated six camps into three, and then announced that it was temporarily closing all of them."[743] Two weeks later, however, the Taliban reopened some of these camps.[744]

An interview with Mullah Mohammad Omar conducted in June 2001 by an American journalist included comments as to bin Laden's lack of the appropriate religious

741. Editorial team, 2001u.

742. Murshed has written that a previous initiative proposed by Mullah Mohammad Omar also failed: "Subsequently, Omar proposed that a small group of ulema from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and a third Islamic country should decide Bin Laden's fate but this was rejected by Washington and Riyadh. Eventually the Taliban established a judicial commission under their chief justice to hear evidence against Bin Laden so that he could be punished. The evidence was provided to Mulla Jalil, the Taliban deputy foreign minister, by US Under-Secretary of State Thomas Pickering during a secret meeting at the Foreign Office in Islamabad on the night of May 27, 2000. Jalil promised that Bin Laden would be brought to justice after the evidence was examined. These facts, which demonstrate Taliban duplicity, need to be exploited by the Karzai government in its reintegration programme for driving a wedge between the armed Afghan opposition and their Al Qaeda backers" (Murshed, 2010).

743. Summarising an article published in the Washington Post (see 'Weekly Intelligence Notes' briefing by the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, http://www.afio.com/sections/wins/2000/2000-31.html (accessed May 4, 2016).

744. Lia, 2009, 293-296.

credentials necessary to issue Islamic *fatwa*s or religious edicts. Omar was hard on bin Laden, saying that his *fatwa*s were, in fact, "null and void":

> *"Bin Laden is not entitled to issue fatwas as he did not complete the mandatory 12 years of Koranic studies to qualify for the position of mufti."*[745]

This brief account of the Taliban's engagement with the outside world over the Indian Airlines hijacking, the Bamiyan Buddhas and the presence of foreign militants inside Afghanistan shows how varied their external engagement was. The disunity of approach — the seeming randomness of certain policy decisions from the perspective of their international interlocutors, for example — reflects the Taliban's growing understanding of their position on the world stage. There were, however, several instances where policy was influenced by external actors — both favourably or against the intentions of those intervening. The realities of the Taliban's government and diplomatic systems meant, however, that there was little unity of approach and much improvisation.

745. de Borchgrave, 2001.

9. Conclusion

"We started this movement for the protection of the faith and the implementation of the shari'a law and the safeguarding of our sovereignty. We started this movement in order to rescue our people from the crisis they were facing and to bring a long-lasting peace and security to this country. The Afghan nation knows us. They know we are their brothers who stood by them in their jihad. They know we are the ones who fought with them in the trenches and the battle fields. We are the ones who made sacrifices during the jihad. […] We know we are on the right path. We also call upon Muslims to prepare themselves for sacrifice in the way of this pious cause. Anyone who fights for the cause of Islam is our brother. We do not choose our friends and enemies on the basis of their language or race. Anyone who believes in our cause is welcome to come and join us. If you look at the history of the Islamic faith, the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) made the first sacrifice. Then the religious students at the time of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) also made great sacrifices. Now it is our turn to work for the cause of Islam and not refrain from any sacrifices. Our wish was the implementation of the Qur'anic law and it still is. We are fighting so that our countrymen can have a peaceful and prosperous life. We are not afraid of dying in the way of this cause."

Mullah Mohammad Omar, May 24, 1995[746]

"The secret of our success is to be found in obedience."

Tolo-ye Afghan newspaper, June 21, 1995[747]

"All the world's infidel powers have united against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the mujahed Afghan nation, and — God forbid! — seek to bring down the pure Islamic system that has been enforced in Afghanistan. The heroic and mujahed Afghan nation have never bowed their heads down to foreigners at any time and have always made sacrifices and referred to great God for assistance. Therefore, the public and all the offices of the Emirate are ordered to — in addition to being ready to make sacrifices — hold Qur'an reading sessions in their mosques and to ask great God for a humiliating embarrassment and the defeat of the infidel powers."

Mullah Mohammad Omar, September 19, 2001[748]

The Taliban movement and government forged their identity *in opposition* for much of their pre-September 2001 existence. They were opposed to "colonialism" of various forms, whether this meant cultural or military subjugation. They sought to eradicate

746. Omar, 1995.

747. Akbar, 1995.

748. Omar, 2001b.

"tyranny" and the parties that had "bred violence and chaos." They spent so long shouting "Leave us alone!" that when the world seemed to do exactly that — for much of the period they ruled over Afghanistan — they were forced to fall back on their core cultural, ideological and social heritage.

There were those within the movement who sought to transition to something new, an identity in which the essentialisms of the *shari'a* system (as they understood it) could coexist with the realities of the international system and allow economic growth. The unexpected end of their government, however, leaves more questions than answers in our speculation about where the movement might have ended up.

Nevertheless, we can isolate some core features of the movement which were found in their actions and statements while they were in power. The structure of their government, featuring the institution of the *Amir ul-Mu'mineen,* was one which allowed for a strong centralisation albeit with intentionally unclear ways of accessing this central authority. A strong cultural identity — derived in part from a mix of religious and Pashtun traditions — was the glue that held the movement together, and that distinguished their leadership from other groups. The informal collegiality which characterised some of the senior leadership's interactions and deliberations was coupled with a strong incentive towards unity; obedience was a core precept of how power was supposed to function under the Taliban. Alongside these factors, we find a strong tendency towards improvisational decision-making, though this was more a product of the context in which they were trying to govern than a strategic calculation to act in that way.

(a) Religious heritage and identity

The leaders of the Taliban movement were in many ways a product of their educational upbringing, both in the ideological structures that they received as well as the networks that characterised this system. This education was an important and characteristic part of the heritage on which they relied during the 1980s as well as post-1994 in taking control of territories and setting up a government. Their religious education gave them a prism through which they could view and assess the world

around them, and it was an important crutch as they took on more responsibility for governing the country. It gave them a way of making moral assessments — a kind of moral compass with a precise configuration — and conceptual frameworks for making course corrections such as the guidance to "command right and forbid wrong".

Duty was an especially important value for the Taliban and was associated with others like austerity. Fulfilling one's duty was seen as a way to satisfy the needs of this world and the next.[749] Even though this moral compunction lacked specificity, it happened to make parts of the Taliban government active and filled with an energy that others before and after them have lacked.

The theology of jihad was important to almost all who fought during the 1980s and the Taliban movement that emerged post-1994 sought to build this as part of the movement's identity. Arguably, this was less important than other factors when viewed as a distinguishing mark or as a cultural unifier.

The religious heritage common to those who had passed through the Deobandi education system was quite prominent in the public reception of the movement. The *Amr bil Marouf* group, the prominence given to executions (however uncommon)[750] and the foregrounding of the concept of justice all played a role. It was a system that could be relied upon to offer direction when complexity raged around them.

(b) Cultural heritage and identity

The key parts of the cultural heritage associated with the Taliban can be derived from the *tarana* songs that were so prominently associated with the movement. This was not a discrete category, however: religious identity blended with the cultural, which in turn blended with ethnicity. All were to various levels constructed and inherited so the Taliban had to select which aspects to emphasise at various key junctures. This cultural

749. Mullah Mohammad Rabbani (December 1997): *"He who accomplishes his duty and responsibility correctly will be successful in this world and the next"* (Rabbani, 1997b).

750. "Taliban Executions", http://www.alexstrick.com/talibanexecutions (accessed May 4, 2016).

space was not necessarily ruled by consistency, either, and contradictory impulses could and did coexist or overlap.

The cultural values that were part of the movement's Pashtun heritage were tribal values that in many ways overlapped with the original impulses at the heart of the tribal culture found in the Prophet Mohammad's time, though just as Islam sought a new supra-tribal path so can we identify something similar in what emerged as cultural products under the Taliban. 'Islamic" values and the light shone by the "shari'a"[751] were emphasised alongside the need for unity and the preservation of one's honour. 'Freedom' and 'brotherhood' are praised alongside the more practical benefits of work, rebuilding that which is destroyed and the practice of creativity. Military themes like the symbol of the sword find emphasis alongside values like sacrifice and the brotherhood of the *sangar* or trench.

The rich universe found in the Taliban's cultural heritage and products display a series of moral and symbolic textures that, while not always unified, became recognisable as something associated with the movement. These strands were bound together with the religious heritage and the emphasis on unity and obedience to give the Taliban a strong identity of their own.

(c) Social history and political heritage

The Taliban's post-1994 experiment relied heavily on precedents derived from the 1980s war and the lessons of previous rulers, whether national or local. These histories of governance and political mobilisation made a strong contribution to how the Taliban formed and enacted their institutional patterns. Their social and political heritage also played a key role in determining how they would interact with other groups and entities once in power. For all of this, the 1980s war is the principal factor, one that is to this day underacknowledged in both scholarly literature and popular conceptions of the Taliban movement. The importance of justice, the combination of austerity and a certain bookishness, and the use of a certain toolbox of interaction and

751. Kadri, 2013, 12.

consolation with others — all of this was derived from the 1980s experience. Also, for the Taliban as a political movement, associated with the religious establishment, the 1980s were when the religious students and elites found for themselves a far broader role than that traditionally practised in the decades before the outbreak of the war.

The political system developed during the early years of the twentieth century was inherited and used as a template that the Taliban did not change in any fundamental sense. They all sought a centralised state, albeit one with varying conceptions of the role that state would play in society.

(d) Mechanisms of policy generation

All these pieces of the senior leadership's heritage came together during the post-1994 years to shape how their movement developed policy and how they would respond to internal and external prompts for change. The Taliban were conscious of the fact that they were doing something new, that their government was an experiment or even a litmus test for future Islamic states (perhaps even globally), and this played into their calculus of how to act.

Improvisation and chance were other hugely important though underacknowledged drivers of the particularities of policy. The government was in some ways strong and functioned as a unitary actor, but the different structures in place made it possible for that policy to exist in different forms at different levels. This was where improvisation could flourish in response to the large number of challenges that confronted the government. Many of those taking policy decisions and crafting a strategy at the national level had no previous experience of government service. This meant they had fewer preconceptions of what a particular policy should be. It also meant that there was a certain amount of reinventing the wheel that needed to take place each time a minister was replaced.

The balancing act between the moral drive for which the Taliban were (in)famous and the pragmatic political calculations was one they never solved in any way that was clear in policy pronouncements. The constitutional committee never concluded its

work and Mullah Mohammad Omar changed his mind on a number of issues in this respect. This was arguably the movement's greatest challenge and ultimate fatal flaw. In the end, Mullah Mohammad Omar let his government collapse rather than find a way to seek out political compromise, even though that instinct was very much part of his heritage and previous patterns.

By 2001, the Taliban had only begun to construct institutions and mechanisms that would have allowed for increased feedback and internal 'churn' which could have started to influence policy decisions at the highest levels. These initial efforts were by no means effective and those last years of government were simultaneously characterised by an increased transfer of the reins to Mullah Mohammad Omar at the expense of other institutions or individuals.

(e) Not unique

The research explored in this dissertation attempts to chart the beginnings of an outline of what made the Taliban unique, but in many ways, it is not helpful (or correct) to see the movement as an anomaly within the Afghan context. They emerged from similar stock to other groups that have sought to take power, with many of the same shaping factors; the Taliban were by no means the only group fighting Soviet and Afghan government forces during the 1980s.

Like other groups of a similar size, the Taliban were divided and manifested various struggles over power and the movement's identity and direction. These competing internal interests and divisions were sometimes ideological but more practical considerations also played a role, such as that of generational change. The premium placed on obedience, loyalty and unity meant that few of these disagreements bubbled up into public view, particularly during that time, but they were nonetheless a prominent part of life inside the Taliban's government.

The Taliban were aware of and frequently exercised the need to compromise with other groups (inside and outside the country). This is perhaps an inevitability of being a state-level political actor, but it often clashed with the Taliban's reluctance and oft-

stated desire to do things their way without making compromises. In a similar way, the movement was subject to blockages of funding. While the abrupt end to their government means the inescapable conclusions to certain financial strategies were never realised, their vision for Afghanistan was heavily constrained by the limitations made by sanctions and their isolation from the world around them.

Even the policies for which the Taliban gained notoriety — the actions of the *Amr bil Marouf*, discriminatory policies against women, the arbitrary imposition of rough-handed justice and the massive centralisation of state power — were all present and firm features of the policies of other individuals, groups and governments. In a similar way, religion and a broader moral agenda were part of the mix of impulses that motivated the Taliban's senior leadership, but they were by no means the only such inputs (either in terms of the overt or actual reasoning).

The Taliban was a movement that underwent significant change, from the small groups operating in trenches and as guerrilla factions during the 1980s to a government administering most of Afghanistan's territory. They were a dynamic movement, not static as many commentators have held. They employed a mix of rational process, improvisation and emotionalism to respond to the situations developing around them.

They were very much a product of the context around them, like other groups. We can make this argument for their identity as Pashtuns, as Afghans, as 'children of the 1980s', as products of their education, as products of the contemporary political culture, and as products of the particular circumstances of their growth (i.e. accidental success).

(f) Things the Taliban left unchanged

Given that so much of the Taliban's identity was bound up in the precedent and heritage of years past, it should be no surprise that many features of life were left unchanged. A strong ruler at the top of the government system and a tendency towards centralisation through his authority was certainly no Taliban innovation,

although some of the precise ways this authority was labelled and used were new. Previous governments may simply have been following the precedent of previous generations without a specific justification for this concentration of power; the Taliban offered an argument derived from religious tradition and the advice of senior scholars and advisors.

The location of large groupings of individuals seeking to offer advice was another characteristic of Afghan political culture that was replicated under the Taliban. This helped form a sense that rule was, to some extent, subject to or influenced by the dictates of consensus even though national-level power was firmly in the hands of Mullah Mohammad Omar. As we have seen, at lower levels, these circles of advice and political entrepreneurs were replicated on a smaller scale.

The Taliban government maintained a relatively loose attitude towards life in the provinces, especially as far as goings-on did not become national or international news. By this token, as long as a particular far-flung area was not causing problems for the government, there was considerable flexibility and freedom within the broad principles uniting the Taliban. (This may well have changed had the Taliban been able to take the entirety of Afghanistan's territory and had they received more international recognition and support.)

Almost all of the traditional government structures and their functions in daily life remained and were replicated by the Taliban. This is another area around which it seems internal debate within the movement was divided or at the very least deliberating possible new directions. The fact that national government remained within these default positions is an indication of the Taliban's improvisatory sense of strategy. Unless something was dysfunctional or drew attention to itself, they mostly left these structural elements alone.

The political economy and the long-established processes of the way Afghan groups and structures interact with the international community and donor institutions was something that the Taliban also left broadly unchanged. The Afghan economy as conceived during most of the twentieth century was unsustainable on its own merits, thus prompting the attentions of outside powers and institutions. Note that the Taliban's government were not particularly effective at this, and what international

support came in during the period of their government was targeted at avoiding emergencies, starvation and truly basic needs.

A final feature of political life was the national leadership's testy relationship with Pakistan. This research has not been focused on a detailed explanation of that interaction, but it should suffice to remark that Afghanistan's neighbours have often sought influence and control over the national leadership. The Taliban, like those before them, never simply capitulated to these outside pressures but worked for a renegotiation where possible.

(g) Things the Taliban changed

While adherence to tradition and a conservative streak were characteristic of the Taliban, they did leave their mark on government through various changes. The first and foremost of these was the elevation of *Ulemaa*' and various other parts of the religious establishment into positions of power. The extent to which this happened under their government was unprecedented in modern Afghan history. This shift was prompted by social changes dating back to the 1980s war, as argued above, but the Taliban sought to solidify these trends into the legal system and into how government was administered. In this, they brought something new.

The rise of the clerical class was not only a formal innovation, but it brought new attitudes and new policies. This was manifest often as a moral edge to the kinds of changes that were sought on the national as well as local level. As noted above, however, the fact that most in positions of power had never served in government before meant that they had greater freedom to innovate. The number of policy changes made under the Taliban, therefore, are not simply a reflection of a revolutionary attitude to society, but also a product of how they had come to power and the novelty of this configuration. When they took over the national bureaucracy in 1996 following the capture of Kabul, the Taliban brought in their own cadre to run the administration, though soon enough realised that they would have to rehire and recall many of the old bureaucrats since only they had experience in running those departments.

The Taliban sought to remove ethnicity as a divisive factor driving Afghan politics. There is considerable leeway to argue both sides in questioning the extent to which the Taliban simply sought to elevate and universalise the Pashtun experience rather than removing ethnicity, though I have argued above that the emphasis on this supra-ethnic identity in the Islamic model should encourage an analysis that takes this intent seriously. At the same time, we can acknowledge the vein of Pashtun chauvinism for which there is evidence from this period. It is not necessary for one analysis to exist to the exclusion of the other in this case. Care should also be taken to distinguish between the actions and drivers of policy that came from individuals versus policy that was the result of the national-level policy discussions that found expression through Mullah Mohammad Omar's decisions.

The Taliban's oppositional agenda, as defined against the corruption and crime of the early 1990s, meant that taking action on petty crime and corruption were signature elements of how they sought to distinguish themselves. It fit into the call for justice as an overarching operating principle of an Islamic society and the *shari'a* system they installed came with institutions already able to handle these issues. They sought ways to pre-empt and ward off corruption by shifting appointees around regularly, though this did not apply as much to the very highest echelons of the Taliban's administration, as in the case of the Supreme Court, for example, where Nur Mohammad Saqib was Chief Justice from March 1998 until the very end.

As a corollary, they sought to streamline government, itself a byproduct of their unprofessionalism (in a neutral sense). They were not products of the civil service, and they were unattached to one institution over another except in as far as it served their administrative purposes. This meant that bureaucracy could often be bypassed and orders could be implemented swiftly. This was the case for national policy as well as on a local level, where the decisions of key players could sometimes open the doors for significant changes; when international NGOs were able to secure permission for their programmes, for example.

The Taliban's use of the term "Emirate" to define their government and the rebranding of Mullah Mohammad Omar as *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* has come to be viewed as one of the key innovations of their government, though it is far from clear that these changes

were intended as such, as was argued above. Despite the current discussions over the revival of various conceptions of 'emirate', 'caliphate', 'amir' and so on in the context of the Islamic State, al-Shabab and/or Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, it is far from clear that Mullah Mohammad Omar and his advisors sought to engineer a conversation over power in the Islamic *umma* writ large. There was some discussion of the implications of taking the title and redefining the state's name within senior leadership circles, of course, but we should be careful not to ascribe too far-reaching aims when the evidence does not currently indicate that Mullah Mohammad Omar sought to lead the entire Muslim world through his government in Afghanistan.

(h) What we might never know

We can divide the things we may never know about the Taliban movement into two broad categories: that which we won't know because good data (particularly primary sources from the time) is hard to find; and that which we won't know because the Taliban's "experiment" was cut short by the international intervention in late 2001.

We will never be able to fully solve the mystery of Taliban intentionality because they continued to be in a state of transition till the very end and because they hadn't even taken the entirety of Afghanistan's territory by that point. Despite the presence of many indicators and hits offering enticements to draw this or that conclusion, there was too much that was in flux, even in 2001, for us to be able to make final judgements as to what might have happened. There are too many counterfactuals to explore, many of which would only be loosely grounded in specific evidence. To some extent, the same applies to attempts to deduce what the post-2001 Taliban want(ed) based on what they wanted pre-2001: too much had changed, internally and in the external context around them, for these strategic analogies to have much value.

Analysts and journalists have often claimed, for example, that because something was the case pre-2001, that it must be the case for the post-intervention period as well. The Taliban were a different organisation, with different rationales and circumstances, after their government fell.

There have been a few studies examining what happens to groups after they seize power and how they start to change in the medium-term as a result of interaction with other groups.[752] They show how the experience of ruling a country over a period of over a decade means that the nature of the state starts to change to one where the pragmatics of power and the rhythms of diplomatic interaction become new norms. The state is brought into the international system and adopts shared values, albeit slowly. It is arguable that the Taliban, too, may have transitioned in such a way had they ruled over Afghanistan for a much longer period. Because the movement was removed before it could grow into something different from the initial impressions we have, it is hard to imagine alternate futures. So many forces and factors made it unlikely that they would ever be able to establish itself on the international diplomatic circuit, for example, as was the case with their tendency towards confrontation towards the end.

Senior figures associated with the movement have started to die. This makes the gathering of oral histories and testimony — whatever the disadvantages of gathering these things so many years after the fact — harder, especially given the general context of the continued conflict. Discussions of the history of the 1990s (and, to a lesser extent, the 1980s) are often contaminated with the need to strike certain positions for a contemporary audience. Individuals have written memoirs, and others are busy completing similar projects, but the continuous glances to the present situation damage the usefulness of the evidence we can assemble.

(i) Future research

Despite these limiting caveats, there is a great deal of research that remains for scholars of the Taliban and South Asian Islamism. The circumstances in which many discovered the Taliban movement — viewed through the burning ashes of New York's Twin Towers — has meant that of the many millions of words written about the movement, hardly any of it has been based on rigorous research, much less through

752. Dionigi, 2014.

the assessment and use of primary sources. There is much work to be done even on the very basic points of fact, before we can talk about more abstract assessments and evaluations.

A useful place to start would be the compilation of a cross-referenced chronology of events in Afghanistan for the 1994-2001 period. Many accounts of the Taliban during this time are plagued by a loose sense of attention to specifically when an event took place, making sure not to use the date of the news agency report rather than converting this back to the Afghan time zone and date.

We also need a comprehensive review and assembly of biographies of those involved in the movement, especially given the fact that there are several cases of multiple individuals sharing the same name. These biographies would include life histories including their affiliations during the 1980s war (if alive/active then) as well as employment records during the Taliban's rule.

Given the ongoing sensitivities, this might be hard to assemble in an ethically sound manner for some years, at least in a way that can be presented publicly; there is too much risk that this information will be somehow instrumentalised in legal cases or, in a worst-case scenario, a military strike against an individual. Indeed, this is a problem which many only diminish with the passing of time; this suggests that the true work examining the Taliban government may only come into its own several decades from now.

The sheer volume of material written about the Taliban movement, particularly that produced post-2001 in association with the international military effort, makes finding useful data difficult. For this reason, a comprehensive annotated bibliography of material relating to the Taliban movement would be a boon for researchers, particularly if it referred to print media articles as well. It would also need to include non-English materials. Note that none of these tasks is particularly onerous or requires fieldwork; the fact that they do not exist yet is a reflection of the extent to which it is easier to leap to conclusions than to establish a bedrock of fact first.

Attention has mostly been directed towards the Taliban's religious and social policies while other aspects of the movement remain unexplored; economic policies practised

by the Taliban were sufficiently different from those of prior governments to merit closer attention, for example. We know a lot about the Taliban's diplomatic interactions with the United States because of the attacks on September 11, but we know far less about that carried out by other countries or organisations. It would be useful to gain more insight into the Taliban's calculations with regards to international investment in natural resource exploitation, for example, as well as a far more nuanced understanding of their relationship with Iran or their Central Asian neighbours.

Chapter three of this dissertation outlined some of the broad themes commonly found in poetry and songs associated with the Taliban during this period, but this material needs comprehensive examination, particularly from those more familiar with the literary history of previous centuries. Internal references from this literary context will bring a deeper sense of the Taliban's connection to their distant past.

I have tried to make a case for examining the Taliban without the lenses of ideology in the text above. Reexamining the different aspects of the Taliban's rule bearing this in mind may offer new insights with applicability to other Islamist movements. For this to happen, a better understanding of internal policy-making and the processes behind it will be necessary.

At the same time, a return to ideology is also required, albeit one understood on the Taliban's terms. For the vast majority of discussions about the Taliban, their religious ideology is summed up using the rubric 'Deobandi' without much more supporting detail. Extensive work is needed to understand the Taliban from within their religious education, from the syllabus most study to the religious argumentation and shorthand employed in discussion among peers. This, again, is where a return to primary source texts will be essential. This has started to take place, but the research can only be said to have begun.

For those who can travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan or other places where those associated with the Taliban are currently based,[753] work needs to be done to gather interview material, to compile oral history testimony and to encourage individuals to

753. This list includes the Gulf and a number of cities in Europe, like London, so it remains within reach of many researchers.

write up their memoirs. All this material will then need to be sifted through in a process of triangulation and finding ways to minimise the opportunity for bias.

(j) Portents and the Taliban post-2001

To what extent does understanding the Taliban's government of the 1990s help predict what was to happen post-2001? As I have argued above, it is possible to identify certain broad continuities and trends that carried over into the post-2001 phase of the Taliban's evolution. The circumstances were sufficiently different, however, that such an exercise must proceed with great caution.

On a very basic level, the more time passed, the more newer generations were absorbed into the movement, thus changing the character of the Taliban in a silent way that was often left unspoken. These younger recruits, some of whom may have no memory of the original impetus behind the founding of the movement in 1994, let alone the formative circumstances of the 1980s *jihad* against the Soviets. This meant that a number of values shared by older-generation Talibs could not be assumed by younger generations. Add to this the pressures of a multi-year insurgency and a withering military campaign waged against them by some of the world's strongest and most technologically-equipped military forces, and it is not hard to see how generational conflict became inevitable.

The differences between younger and older affiliates of the Taliban were accentuated through military interventions that seemed to encourage ideological inflexibility and the increased radicalisation (through a process of competition) within mid-level leadership.[754] Issues surrounding command and control of the forces fighting nominally under their banner saw the publication of several iterations of rulebooks or *layeha* from 2006 onwards.[755] These are clearly modelled on Ludhianvi's *Obedience to the Amir* and share similar messages: obedience, loyalty and unity above all else.

754. Borger, 2011; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a; Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2011.
755. Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012a, 287-289.

At the same time as younger generations were progressively ideologised during the post-2001 years, senior leadership figures seem to have found less use for religious ideology as the years passed. Religious discourse was (and is) hardly mentioned in the movement's public statements in the years that followed, and memoirs by those involved invoke religion almost as a *pro forma* reference. In fact, the only time the Taliban were forced to acknowledge overtly religious argumentation and sourcing was when they were challenged in November 2012 by former mujahedeen leader and religious scholar Sayyaf to provide the specific justification and divine sanction for the use of suicide-bombing as a tactic.[756] They issued one short statement that gave none of the details of their justification, and then a second longer statement that was a little more detailed, but the months that had passed since Sayyaf issued his challenge revealed what was really going on: that the Taliban's use of suicide bombers was not religiously inspired, but rather couched post-facto in religious rhetoric and instead used in part as a military tactic that proved effective at a certain time.[757]

Parts of the political wing of the post-2001 Afghan Taliban incarnation[758] interacted with international diplomatic actors in recent years and certain parts of this should have come as no surprise: a stubbornness and inflexibility in certain aspects of what was being discussed; the inability for those outside the highest leadership tier to take decisions; the use of 'beautiful faces' as a smokescreen behind which those taking decisions could hide. Indeed, given the considerable overlap and recycling of figures associated with the pre-2001 diplomacy in the post-2001 discussions, these lessons are arguably the most salient and carry the greatest portent for ongoing efforts.[759]

Deal-making and pragmatic political action was still very much a part of how the Taliban behaved, as evidenced by the way they surrendered in late 2001 and how many of them sought to fold themselves into the government and social order that had emerged after the fall of their government.[760] Indeed, a failure to recognise this

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756. "Abdul Rabb Rasul Sayyaf speech", September 9, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1TN4a4TxxA (accessed May 4, 2016).

757. Those statements have since been taken offline, but I retain a copy of both in my personal archive.

758. Not only do we have to distinguish between different sectors of the Taliban, post-2001, but the emergence of the Pakistani Taliban in 2007 means that it is prudent to make that identification as well.

759. Kuehn, Felix (forthcoming), Doctoral dissertation. (London: King's College London).

760. See Gopal, 2014, for a full exploration of the extent to which the post-2001 insurgency was an

tendency among the Taliban for many years — and their casting as inflexible ideologues — has arguably lengthened and intensified how the Afghan conflict has unfolded.

Membership in the Taliban was never a fixed element of how the movement worked during the 1990s, and this continued in the post-2001 order.[761] The looseness of the boundaries of institutional membership in the post-2001 years should not have come as a surprise, therefore, either to legal entities trying to prosecute Taliban affiliates held at Guantánamo Bay or to the various military forces trying to assess who constituted a legitimate target.

(k) The Taliban post-2016?

There is no single Taliban strategy or set of goals. The movement is heterogenous by nature and continues to undergo considerable changes that see a deepening fragmentation within. There appear to be considerable differences as to the political and military future of the Taliban internally; outright splinter groups have emerged for the first time in the Taliban's history.

An examination of the Taliban communiqués issued since 2001 shows that the leadership regularly fails to explicitly address questions such as whether they desire power in the same form as the mid-late 1990s. Their official communications and interviews with figures from the political wing suggest that lessons from the 1990s have been learnt. Their statements and interviews conducted show a growing understanding regarding key concerns of the international community, particularly in as much as they affect the external perception of the Taliban movement.[762] This

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inevitability or not.

761. "Membership of the movement was signified by the fact of having fought in Taliban groups or of carrying out administrative duties. This is the conclusion from the decrees of Mullah Omar, where he calls for the expulsion of corrupt members of the movement (Decree 49, Gazette 788)" (Dorronsoro, 2005).

762. The implication is not that the senior leadership have necessarily changed their stance on issues regarding *shari'a* law and human rights, or women's rights. Rather, there appears to be a growing understanding and awareness among political Taliban that the handling of these issues have a significant impact on foreign relations and are important to the international community with regards to Afghanistan.

paradoxical combination (violence and brutality versus understanding the shortcomings of such tactics) should be regarded as part of the natural divide between the fighting vanguard of the movement and its political base.

The Taliban have issued statements outlining their goals but much about their aspirations remains disputed. The underlying assumption is that they aim to return to power and resurrect the 'Emirate'.[763] While their communiqués are issued in the name of the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' and they present themselves as a government in absentia, the lack of explicit statements to this end may reveal more flexibility than is often assumed.

> *The Islamic Emirate has curtains [sic] goals to achieve. They are:*
>
> *1. Complete independence of the country.*
>
> *2. Establishment of an Islamic system representing the wants and aspiration of the Afghan people.*
>
> *3. Progress and prosperity of the country and people.*
>
> *Our first priority is to achieve these goals through talks and negotiation. But if the invading powers in Afghanistan are not ready to give the Afghans their natural rights which is the right of independence and establishment of a government based on their aspirations and wants, then the Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate are determined to carry on the fight until the realization of the said goals.*[764]

In a statement issued in March 2011, the Taliban state the following on the possibility of peace:

> *We think, if the Contact Group, the Islamic Conference and other circles really want to bring the current war in Afghanistan to an end, then the solution is very clear and feasible — they should withdraw 150,000 foreign forces from Afghanistan unconditionally and pave the way for establishment of an Islamic System on the basis of the Islamic and national aspirations of the Afghans.*[765]

763. See, for instance, Tatchell, 2011.

764. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2010b.

765. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2011.

Many of their messages incorporate legitimate complaints of the population against the foreign forces and the Afghan government.

The core goals of the Taliban post-2001 are justice and a role in the political future of the country. International commentators often voice concern about the revisionist nature of analyses of the Taliban, pointing towards the countless human rights abuses the movement committed while in power and since their ousting in 2001.[766] These correctly assess that the Taliban are far from being "modern Robin Hoods" who simply defend their own rights or those of the people; it is nevertheless informative to examine the underlying developments. Local shifts in perception reflect at least a partial reality: corruption and the poor performance of the Afghan government in conjunction with oft-voiced promises and pledges have eroded the credibility of the government in Kabul and the internationals. There is an obvious disconnect between the message and the deed. The Taliban, on the other hand, while employing tactics to sow fear, appear to be consistent, and if not in reality then at least in the perceptions of many.[767] The considerations seem pragmatic for the most part rather than an explicit subscription to the Taliban's goals and narrative.

The old-generation Taliban's leverage over the chain-of-command is increasingly limited to a degree that significantly hampers their influence over all parts of the movement currently fighting, rendering the chance of forging a lasting peace more and more unlikely.[768] A central motivation for the senior leadership to engage in a political solution, besides their growing marginalisation, is the awareness of the possibility of another civil war that looms if no political solution is found.

While there might be incentives to find a political solution, there are also factions within the insurgency and the Afghan government that are opposed to a settlement — or a substantial inclusion of the insurgency into the current political paradigm.

766. Anonymous, 2010; Marlowe, 2010.

767. Interviews and conversations (Kandahar, Helmand, Kabul, Khost, Baghlan, Kunduz, Ghazni, Paktya, Nangarhar, Wardak, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Badghis, Faryab and Badakhshan, 2005-13.

768. There is, of course, always the possibility of using Pakistan as a partner for a negotiated settlement, a party with real leverage over regional insurgent groups, as suggested by Dorronsoro.

President Ghani has stressed that he seeks reconciliation, but there are significant voices within and outside the current administration that are not interested in any such process.

To ask the question "what do the Taliban want" is already to apply a certain analysis as to who the Taliban are and how to think about them. There are groups within the umbrella term that make up 'the Taliban' — from the field commanders and common fighters to the high-level leaders, from the eastern fighters that increasingly operate and interact with non-Afghan entities to the old senior leadership in Quetta, Karachi and other places. The emergence of forces nominally loyal to the Islamic State in eastern Afghanistan and elsewhere offers yet another challenge to unity and centralisation, one that was accentuated following the revelation of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar. A political process needs to be understood as engaging certain elements within this broad grouping and needs to take into account what this engagement means for each particular group in relation to the other parts and interests.

Given that fragmentation is the prevalent dynamic currently, engagement will certainly encourage doubt of those individuals and groups that do participate. This, however, is not a divide-and-conquer strategy in which the goal is to play sections off against each other. There are no sections; sections are shifting and formed and reformed, and alliances easily switched. If the goal is to divide the Taliban — rather than to pull as many as possible over onto the side that is negotiating — this will directly translate into a marginalisation of the people with whom government representatives talk to a degree that makes the whole process irrelevant.

The starting positions that all parties bring to political negotiations will often transform — through compromises or otherwise — into something else by the time they are ready for a final agreement. It should not be forgotten, though, that this process can often be generative of new ideas. In this way, part of the answer to the question 'what do the Taliban want' will be revealed and discovered through the very

process of negotiation. Not only will the process reveal what they want, but will also solidify (and to a certain extent, create) who 'they' are.

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